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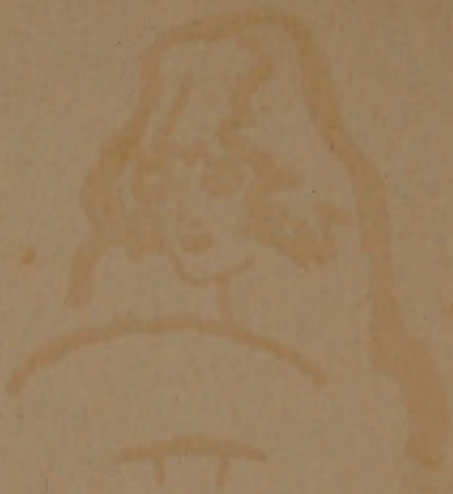
THE SILVER VIRGIN



THE SILVER VIRGIN

BY

IDA A. R. WYLIE

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I

1

And now Gale felt that he had come home.

It was, he thought, like the homecoming of a dead man who, at the long last, with a sense of recognition and release, has let go his bitter hold on the phantasmagoria of life. Home, to Gale, had been England and the warm, twilight house where his people had always lived and the sweeping downs, so desolate, so old and saturated with life that on the bleakest winter's day one was not alone among them. He renounced the thought of them. This place, with its silence, its static frozen emptiness at once strange and familiar like a memory leaping out of a black waste of ancient experience, had become home —the sanctuary into which he flung himself, panting from the pursuit.

He drew a long breath that shuddered a little. It was as though he had been crying bitterly and the crying fit was over. He was still young and well grown with a blunt-featured sensual beauty. The thick, fair hair and sullen, baffled eyes made him seem boyish—the full, curved mouth and thrust-out chin aggressive and dangerous to himself. As he swung along the dusty road with the easy gait of a perfect body he was like a fine animal tormented by a spiritual grace that he both feared and hated.

The road was dead. It ran white and still along the crest of a mountain spur out into the plain. It ended with a lofty promontory out of which grew the brown walls and tower of a fortressed village. Gale remembered how he had first seen the place, ten years ago, and how he hadn't quite believed in

it. Somehow it hadn't seemed possible. He had had a dozen thoughts about it—whimsical, fantastic thoughts, because at that time life had been a whimsical, fantastic business. He had thought of it as the high prow of a ship thrusting out into a dead sea; and then again as of an enchanted castle of a child's nightmare. It had seemed incredibly remote and lonely. With all his imaginings he hadn't been able to connect it with ordinary human life. And after several days that sense of strangeness had only deepened. He had seemed to be living in the shadow of a place that had once been and amid the shadows of men. They were cold and untroubled, the sun could not warm them. Nor could they be made to suffer. At first in his arrogant youthfulness he had been merely puzzled and curious—but in the end discomforted. He had been glad to escape.

And now he was coming back.

Gale stopped a moment, shifting his knapsack. The failing light, unclouded and untender, sharpened the harsh austerity of the world on either hand of him. To the east he could look straight across to the high iron walls of Navarre. To the north the Pyrenees gathered together in ghostly communion against the coming nightfall. There was not a tree, not a gleam of warmth to mitigate a proud nakedness which in its turn made the teeming growth and activity beyond its frontiers seem in recollection futile and fantastic. Yes, the plain was like a sea, Gale thought—a sea long forgotten that had beaten backward and forward between these two lines of stupendous cliffs until one day a spell had been cast against it and it had stood still. It had become enchanted earth—dark red as though soaked in the blood of contending armies, and set forever in frozen waves and tides and whirlpools. Vineyards and pasture were beginning to grow over them, but still the blood-red earth showed through. And never would it be other than a dead sea, belonging to a dead age and hostile, contemptuous of life.

Gale embraced the vision and held it close to him like a sharp challenging pain.

2

A shepherd with a little overladen donkey stood by the roadside and waited for Gale's approach. The two of them were so motionless that Gale had seen them at first as dwarfed, grotesque trees against the light. The man wore the local *boina* on his grizzled hair and a tattered sheepskin coat and breeches. His feet were tied in worn *alpargatas*. The little donkey was almost hidden under its burden of fodder and stood with its thin legs stiffly planted and its head bowed. There was blood on its neck—old, dried blood and fresh, bright blood from the recent jabbings of the goad. The blood dripped very slowly onto the dust.

The shepherd leaned with his arm against the donkey in an attitude of classical repose. His face was dark and spare as an Arab's and carved with long, deep furrows. The eyes that rested on Gale were calm, indifferent, without curiosity. And yet Gale knew that the man had waited for him.

"Pardon, señor, but that's the Castello de la Virgen up there, isn't it?"

He spoke to break the silence—fluently but with an accent that had made Justine, who knew the language perfectly, laugh at him. The shepherd's expression remained closed. He nodded.

"Yes, señor. That is the village."

"Is it far from here?"

"Two hours—as you walk, señor."

"Is there a place where I could find lodging?"

"There is a *fonda*, señor. But no place for a stranger."

"I am not a stranger. At least, not quite. I was up there ten years ago. Don Cristóbal befriended me—became my friend."

The shepherd lowered his eyes.

"The hand of God has been against Don Cristóbal. He will not know you, señor."

"He is dead!"

"He is mad."

"Perhaps he will know me, all the same."

"He knows no one, señor."

Gale lifted his head truculently.

"Well, there is my destination. Go with God."

"Go with God, señor."

Gale strode on. But once he looked back. The shepherd and his donkey had resumed the road. They moved slowly. Their pace seemed part of the immemorial rhythm of their world. Gale saw that the man was lame with a cruel, hurting lameness. But he walked steadily. And that acceptance of suffering by both man and donkey assuaged Gale with a sense of freedom.

3

The walls grew out of the earth. They were the colour of the earth out of which the blood had been dried by the sun. Their dark brown stones were piled loosely upon one another, and where they had fallen there had been no effort to replace them. Their strength was that of a skeleton on which the flesh has withered and whose joints have dropped apart. But the decay had been arrested and for a thousand years would go no further. The buttressed outer wall followed the road, and the road twisted hither and thither until it crept through a crumbling gateway into the heart of the defence. From within the second wall—a stark, ominous cliff of shadow cut by old loopholes that had become windows—the church tower reared up against the stars, stiff and unyielding, like an ancient sentry whose tragic eyes kept watch over the plains for an enemy long since passed away into a night of forgotten things. There were lights in the windows and in the dim archways, but they

were rayless and gave the effect of being painted on a dead-black backcloth.

Beyond the gates the road rose more steeply. The broken cobbles were overlaid by a dust that lifted in whirls under Gale's feet, subduing his steps to a small muffled thud. Close at hand, yet as though coming from another world, the wooden wheel of a bullock wagon screeched, shrill and rhythmic; a woman sang; children called to one another. The four bells in the belfry overhead dropped four sudden notes, cracked, yet sweet like those of an old ghostly singer. Beneath the silence that flowed back over their lingering echo Gale caught the metallic undertone of men's voices.

Yet he was quite alone. And he stood still for a moment, hesitating on the verge of this secret life.

It was curious how clearly he remembered everything—especially since so much had happened and been forgotten. He remembered how the road ran out into the Plaza Mayor, a bleak platform of rock guarded by broken ramparts where at night the people gathered and sometimes danced sombrely together and the children played until the early hours of the morning. Gale remembered how fiercely that life had seemed to burst out of the hot afternoon's silence and how it had been followed by another silence, lasting till dawn, that had been like a significant break in a passage of music, preparing the mind for a return to a basic melody—the creak of the ox carts on their way down to the valley, a donkey's harsh, ironic laughter, the clatter of hoofs, the soft patter of women's feet on the uneven cobbles.

To the left of the Plaza steep stone steps led through a deep archway of the inner defences to the church door. And at the far corner the road, grown narrow and tortuous under the name of the Calle de la Virgen, resumed its course and crept between crumbling houses to the burial ground. The burial ground lay behind the church and was the highest point

in the village. It was like an immense bier set on tall trestles whose thin pall of grass covered centuries of dead.

Every morning the women passed its rusted, broken gates. They came carrying their jars and pitchers to the stream that flowed down from the mountains. It was their only water supply, and even so it did not reach the village itself, but where the high ground of the cemetery blocked its course swung aside and went tumbling down its rocky bed to the river. The procession of women had delighted Gale. He had sat on his window sill, baking himself in the steady sunlight and feeling like a spectator of a pageant that came down uninterrupted through the ages. He loved women, anyway. He had taken them as he had taken his sports and every other splendid offering of life—at once seriously and gaily. And these women were a new adventure. They were as strange and baffling as the land itself. And so when Anna, slender and dark and earnest, had looked up and met his laughter with her gravity, the easy fire had lighted in him. In a minute he had bounded down the rickety stairs and taken the girl's pitcher from her and explained in his still more rickety Spanish how absurd the whole performance was. He had even offered to run a conduit down to the Plaza and instal a fountain for them.

And Anna had started at him with a sort of solemn horror, immensely diverting.

Afterward Don Cristóbal had explained. There had been a certain reproof in his explanation, very courteously veiled in delicate phrases. But Gale had only half listened, being concerned at the moment with a new passage in his selective and charming love-life.

It seemed that long ago, yet so close to Don Cristóbal's inner vision that he spoke with the authority of a witness, the village fortress had been hard pressed by enemies. The wells had run dry and the Moors were battering at the gates. Don Cristóbal's ancestor, Don Fernando, had led the defence, but

even his courage had been of no avail against the superior forces without and the suffering and discouragement within. The besiegers had actually reached the ramparts and the villagers had taken refuge in the church itself, preparing to be massacred at its altar when a miracle had been vouchsafed. The Virgin had appeared in glory over the mountains and from her pitying outstretched hand the water had flowed down to the thirst-tormented villagers, giving them such fervent courage that they had flung back their enemy with awful slaughter. And since that time the stream had gone its way, undiverted. For to change its course would be to attempt to change the course of God's will.

And now Gale remembered the very tones of Don Cristóbal's voice, his stately incredulity and scorn of present things illuminated by a child's faith in that inviolable past.

A loosened stone rolled from under Gale's foot. And at that unexpected movement a dog shot out of the shadow and ran ahead of him and then stood still, looking back fearfully. The creature had a ghost's quality of visibility and darkness. It seemed to Gale that it was by the crazed light of these pale eyes that he could see the starting ribs, the long, withered teats and pitiful fleshless skull. He called gently, but the cur answered the sound of his voice with a strange scream and fled, scuffling through a black break in the wall. And Gale laughed at himself. Pity, as he understood it, had been dead in this place a thousand years.

And now Gale had reached the crest of the hill. Across the Plaza he could see the villagers, gathered by the ramparts, their shadows blocked out against the bright polished immensity of the night. It was as though he had come into the very heart of that hidden life whose footsteps had seemed to haunt his own. The voices were close now. They had become human; they remained alien and inimical. A cigarette end made a red planet among the stars. The door of a house stood

open and let out a shaft of light across which the children fluttered like great moths. As they saw Gale they stood still and their shrill voices dropped. He seemed to himself monstrously tall and fair among them.

They came closer, soft-footed, not speaking, not smiling. They made a half circle about him, but as he advanced they fell back step by step, to where the men and women waited. Someone returned his salutation and there was again silence. He seemed to hear the sea that had come to life in the darkness, beating its ghostly waves against the base of the rocks.

"Yes, there is the *fonda,* señor—there where you see the light."

"Who is the patron? I should like to speak with him."

"It is I, señor; I am Jaime Balthazar. I sell wine. But I have no place for strangers."

Gale set his teeth on their hostility. It tasted bitter and good. It challenged his mortal weariness.

"I have come a long way. I must sleep somewhere. Will someone show me to Don Cristóbal's house?"

He had guessed that the name would puzzle them. They looked at one another. A boy came out of the crowd of children. He was so small that his voice sounded prematurely old. Someone struck a match and the brief light glowed on his brown, wizened face and danced in the black monkey eyes. Compared to the rest of them, he seemed almost wickedly alive like an alien sprite among the shades of grave dignitaries.

"I am Pepe. And I will show the way to the Señor."

Gale heard laughter behind him. But the little figure trudged at his side, its stride earnest and important.

"It is like this. The Señor is a foreigner. No foreigners ever come here."

"Two came," Gale said, "ten years ago."

"Ah, but I was not born then. I am nine years old. I have no father or mother. I would share my bed with the Señor,

but it would not be suitable. Sometimes when it is very hot I sleep on the stones under the archway. But in winter I creep into the ox stalls. The Señor would not care even for the ox stalls, though there is at least straw——"

"I have slept in stranger places," Gale observed.

"Well, one is free that way. Like the dogs. Only the dogs starve. I don't starve. The people feed me because I am a Christian."

"A Christian," Gale echoed absently.

"Yes, señor. Father Valeza baptized me. My mother held me in her arms. So I am told. I do not remember. After that she died."

"Yours is a sad story, Pepe."

"I do not know. People do die. In the wintertime someone dies every day. But I am alive. So I am happy. There is Don Cristóbal's house. But I would not go in if I were you. Mother María has an evil tongue. As to Don Cristóbal, God has afflicted him. He sees things no one sees. He does not see us at all."

Gale looked up. After all, nothing had happened. The same oil lamp burned tranquilly over the doorway and lighted with a dim magnificence the heraldic beasts that reared themselves in static ferocity about the weather-beaten armorial shield. The house was white and tall and still. It bore its ruin with the same reticence as that with which it bore the company of its still poorer neighbours who seemed to cling to it as though in some accepted way it offered them the protection of an ancient strength. The door stood open. In the whitewashed vestibule a second lamp burned before a small retable. From out of the mellow golds and browns dim saintly faces gazed down at Gale with an aloof tenderness as though even to them he was the heretic and the stranger.

A broad, noble staircase led up into the darkness. There Gale hesitated. He was quite alone now. For Pepe waited dis-

creetly outside. He called softly, daunted by the sound of his own voice.

"Don Cristóbal, here is an old friend to see you."

There was a listening silence. Then Gale heard a clatter of bolts and sounds of protest. A door overhead burst open and a man strode to the head of the staircase. Gale recognized him, and yet he had passed almost beyond recognition. He had grown old and spectral with starvation. Gale thought involuntarily of the dog that had fled before him. But in this gaunt bearded face some fine element of the soul persisted and showed dimly through its worn and tattered vestments. He carried an ancient two-handed sword and a steel breastplate covered the meagre upright body. With his free hand he made a single gesture that was both of salutation and challenge. And Gale knew then why they thought him mad. For under the deep brows the eyes were dark with visionary things.

"So you have come at last, Emir. I have invited you time and time again and you have stayed down in the valley with your hosts and your banners. But now, by the Virgin, I am glad you have chosen a man's part."

The voice had not changed. It had the same metallic quality, at once sweet and masculine.

"Don Cristóbal—listen—don't you remember—your friend—the Englishman—Gale Braddyl——"

"Let it be your God against mine, Emir."

An old woman came out behind him. She took him by the arm and shook him roughly.

"This is enough foolishness. What are you thinking of? There is no Emir. I tell you so a thousand times. Give me that sword. One of these days you will do yourself a mischief. And you, whoever you are, don't you know better than to shout like that in a stranger's house?"

She beat the stair rail with her angry fist. But Gale saw only the bewilderment in the old face—the break-up of that

proud passion into a child's helplessness. The fantastic mediæval figure was dragged back unprotesting. A door slammed.

"You see," Pepe said, peering in at him, "it is as I told you. He is mad. Where shall I take you now, señor?"

Gale laughed.

"Let's try the church, young friend. Perhaps even a stranger may claim sanctuary."

4

The tiny square outside the church door was empty of everything but Gale Braddyl and his companion and their two shadows. Down the steps and through the archway were voices. But here were quiet and starlight. The pointed Gothic arches were carved in ebony and silver, and Gale had never seen the little figures in the tympanum stand out with such clear delicacy. Always they had possessed a pathetic charm for him—something that held him between tears and laughter as, perhaps, they were meant to do. He had sat for hours on the low parapet which guarded the square against the straight drop to the roadway, fifty feet below, and had looked up at them—at the enthroned Virgin with the Infant standing on her knee and the adoring Magi and the great six-pointed star fixed so steadfastly in its stony firmament. And underneath were the twelve Apostles at the Last Supper, with John resting a quaint curly head on the Master's heart. One of the Apostles had lost his head altogether and others had lost their expressive, gesturing hands. But all their little feet peeped out from under the stiff folds of the tablecloth.

Only Judas broke the order of their seating. He knelt alone on the far side of the table, and over the head of John he and Jesus looked at one another. In his place at the table the artist had set a jar, full, no doubt, of the thirty silver pieces, and somehow the thing was so tragic that Gale couldn't

bear it. He would turn his eyes away to the gorgeous cock, perched with the sudden wilfulness of the Gothic spirit, on the very edge of an arch and crowing reproachfully. Gale liked to remember that the good Peter had also been something of a traitor.

But indeed he had grown to love them all like living people. And he had felt that the unknown artist had loved them, too. No doubt the Gospels had been a closed book to him, and the people of the fairy story had been left to his fancy and his tenderness.

And then when Gale had tired of watching them—for it did seem to him after a time that they moved softly and talked to one another in low voices—and had puzzled his head over the battered legends above the capitals, it had been good to turn away from these Gothic mysteries to the wide plains at his feet and, smoking his pipe peacefully in the sunlight, watch the changing colours of that strange earth, and weave together threads of history and legend, conjuring up great Moorish armies and stern, desperate men who had once stood in his place, holding this outpost of Christendom inviolate.

And underneath, like a leit-motif, ran the knowledge that all these things were dust, whereas Gale Braddyl was alive—glowing with life—and with the whole world in his strong, eager grasp.

All day long people came and went through the softly creaking church door—old peasant women and men and young girls with cheap black veils over their shining hair, and tumbling, scrambling children. They came as though paying a visit to a wise, friendly neighbour—a hurried visit, since there was so much work to do, but made and received gladly. Gale had felt a smiling envy of them. He had felt like presenting himself to the gaunt young priest and demanding conversion so that he might be one of them and have a part of that happy intimacy with God and all His kindly, understanding saints.

And then it had been here that he had met Justine.

Perhaps it wasn't wise to let himself remember that. But then he was so numb with weariness that he couldn't feel anything very much. Nothing seemed quite real—not even Gale himself. And yet he had only to close his eyes a moment to see sunshine where there was now starlight and to fill the little empty square with groups of idle Christians who stood outside the church and waited for the procession to come back and listened to the deep murmur of prayer within and the tinkle of the holy bell, bringing all the good Christians to their knees before the miracle.

And Justine——

Gale had waited, too, because he loved these almost daily processions. Even then he had realized the harshness of life on this bleak rock and had understood how the human hunger for gentle, lovely things had found refuge in this dark church and in her mysteries. He hadn't understood a great deal because he had been too happy to catch these undertones which now sounded so ominous and unmistakable. But he had had a sort of generosity that had made him sometimes unexpectedly intuitive and compassionate.

He had been waiting for Anna. Anna was in the Procession of Maidens. She walked, as was her right, just behind the silver statue of the Virgin with other maidens. She carried a pale blue banner, and when she saw Gale the blood had flown to her eyes and she had nearly lost herself in the silken folds as though she were trying to hide her shame from him. But really she was blind with happiness and pride. And Gale had kept a serious, disapproving face—just to tease her.

And then Justine——

She had seemed to come from nowhere. And once she had come, there was no one else. A strange young figure. The loiterers could not take their eyes from her. They would not have thought her beautiful. To them she must have seemed something unholy—a heretic and a witch. Everything about

her must have offended their prejudices—the short skirt, the brogued shoes, the silk blouse with the sleeves rolled up, the air of combined hardiness and delicacy, reserve and freedom, which ran through her whole being. A peasant they understood, and a fine lady they might have recognized. But she was beyond their experience or their imagination. Fine ladies didn't carry themselves like athletes, and a peasant's strength was stiff, enduring, patient. Hers went out of her, gaily and splendidly, like marching music. And then the dark red hair, cut short—and in those days short hair was new even to Gale and half offended him, too—but so rich and thick that it was gorgeous to see the wind blow through it.

She didn't seem to mind the sun. Her skin was burnt brown and the short, straight nose freckled all over. She was too sure of her youth, perhaps, and of some enduring quality in herself. She would always be grand to look on, even as an old woman, because of that pure essence of life in her.

Her eyes startled Gale. With her colouring he had expected them to be blue or gray—pale, disappointing eyes probably. Instead they were dark brown—fiery red-brown eyes that with all their steadiness had a look of hunger and a certain trouble, as though, Gale thought, they saw things they didn't understand. As they met Gale's regard they widened a little with astonishment. And Gale's hands tightened on the edge of the parapet where he sat—he did not in the least know why.

She carried a stout stick and a knapsack. She could not have added to herself two details that could have made her seem more outrageous to the hostile scrutiny of the villagers. But by all these details Gale recognized her. She was English—his sort of Englishwoman. In a way he knew all about her. It amused him to place her people—county people, no doubt, hunting people, dead sure of themselves and of their tradition, conventional—and yet capable of more freakish unconventionalities, more desperate breaks for liberty, more pas-

sionate outbursts of mad ideas and sheer mysticism than any people in the world.

It wasn't really odd, therefore, that she should be here. You might meet her kind in the wilds of an African jungle—in tatters probably, gaunt with privation, in search of God knows what, and to the bone unchangeably, unconquerably themselves.

Suddenly, however, she had seemed disturbed by that silent hostility. She had gone to the church door and opened it as though to go through. The tide of prayer flowed out into the sunlight, and Gale, answering to the resentful stir about him, had stepped up to her. He said quietly:

"Please forgive me. I'm English, too, so of course I oughtn't to speak to you. But I wouldn't go in—not now. They're a queer people. They resent strangers—especially sightseers—and especially at their prayers."

She still held the door half open—not obstinately, but as though caught motionless by something stronger than herself. The church was very dark after the bright sunshine. From where they stood they could not see the altar, but the glow of it was on the rolling clouds of incense and on the faces turned to them in astonishment. The drone of the prayers went on, but absently, like the drone of bees. Gale remembered that the men and women had been divided from one another and that the separation had given them a strange cohesion and force.

Justine let the door close softly.

"I'm not exactly a sightseer," she said, "and I wasn't really intruding. I wanted to say my prayers. But it doesn't matter."

"The procession will be back in a minute," Gale explained. "It just makes the round of the village, and that isn't far. Then it will be all over and you can go in."

"Thank you," she said tranquilly.

She had accepted his presence. She even went back with him to his place and stood beside him. But she did not speak

to him again, and he respected their common tradition of reticence. It was not his business to inquire the reasoning of her coming nor to point out the dangers of her eccentricity. But he was oddly pleased to have her there. It made him realize how little this intermezzo meant to him. She was like a messenger from his own world warning him that it was time to come home. And when the procession, led by the sad young priest, came toiling up through the archway he had not even seen Anna, who crept into the church like a forsaken child, all her glory dead about her.

When Gale turned at last to speak he found the stranger gone.

At first he hadn't worried. It wasn't easy to lose anybody in that tiny village, and besides he didn't want to hurry into an intrusion. Presently he would go in search of her. He would introduce himself, and no doubt they would have friends in common. Then he would take her up to Don Cristóbal, who would respect other aristocratic traditions even if they were strange to him.

The early morning brightness had passed. One of the sudden regional storms had come up over the mountains and he had begun to look for her in earnest. But she had gone. There was no doubt of it. Luis, the old rope maker, had seen her go down the road to the plain—striding like a man, as he added with indignation. And then Gale had done something unprecedented and unforgivable. He had run back to his room and tossed his things together and thrown money on the table. Ten minutes later he was jockeying the big touring car out of the crowded stable which had been its home for a month and was off down the steep broken road—forty miles an hour, regardless of broken springs and of the hideous cloud of dust behind him.

He hadn't even said good-bye.

And he had never come back—not till this night.

He had been afraid for her, of course. No wayfarer—let

alone a woman—was really safe in a country where the unknown is always feared and hated. But it was more than that. Something in him had leaped awake—a force that had made the casual laughter-loving emotions of his youth seem less than airy fancies. Suddenly he had become aware of a definite purpose in himself—of having been caught out of the easy backwaters into the main stream of life.

"Are you going in, señor?"

"Why not, Pepe? It's as good a place as another. And I'm like you. I can sleep anywhere."

"Eso es, señor. But I'd rather be out of doors. The altar lights frighten me when I wake up suddenly. Once I saw the Virgin move as though she were coming down from her throne. Luis said it was a miracle and that if I hadn't run away I might have received the stigmata and pilgrims would have come again as they did in the old days. But I'm glad I did run. I don't like miracles. So good-night, señor. Go with God."

"Go with God yourself, infant."

The door was unlocked, as it had always been. Not that they held their treasure lightly. But it was beyond their conception that a thief should dare lay hands on it. Only reverent feet could go up safely through that stone avenue of overshadowing trees and past the deep caverns of the side altars to where the flame of a single lamp genuflected in gentle, faithful adoration. The Virgin herself shone palely in her niche in the midst of the great gold retable—a vulgar modern thing that even in the daytime had touched Gale by the ungrudging extravagance of its devotion. Now with its garishness shrouded it had the transcendental quality of a cloud lit by an afterglow.

He approached softly. He had an odd desire to come close to her—to touch the fringe of her unchangeableness. For ten centuries she had gazed down with that look of passionless astonishment at her own miracle. She who had been a mortal

woman had been wrought into earthly immortality—she did not know how or why. And yet one hand was outstretched as though forever she were asking the worshipper to behold the simplicity of her knowledge.

The grave, elderly child on her knee lifted two fingers in quaint admonition and blessing.

A marvel of mediæval craftsmanship. So the wandering, drunken artist in Tuella had told Gale, and Gale had changed his own vagrant course with the rich man's careless purpose of making the marvel his own. You could buy anything. But at once he had fallen under an enchantment. His brief lust of possession made him ashamed.

Yes, a miracle in itself. The silversmith who had worked his metal into those lines of mystical simplicity had known something that had since been lost in the chaos of time. He had known what the miracle really stood for and why an incredulous humanity clung to it as though for succour, hiding its passionate weariness in that creative virginity.

Justine——

O God, why had he got to think of her now when he could hardly stand for weariness? Hadn't he walked himself dead so that he shouldn't think? He could understand why people killed each other and themselves—just to put an end to this tearing to pieces of their very vitals.

He slipped off his knapsack. He unrolled his greatcoat and made a bed for himself beneath one of the columns nearest the altar. He lay down where for centuries pilgrims had stretched themselves. It seemed to him that he could feel the impress of their countless tired bodies on the worn stone.

He knew that the door opened softly and that curious eyes peered in. But gradually the tide of that remembered silence flowed over him.

He slept deeply. Sometimes he would turn over sighing and lay his hand to the stones as though he were feverish and the bloodless cold comforted him. And once he started up to a

semi-awareness of a dark-robed man passing noiselessly to the sacristy. After that the sacristy door made a tunnel of clear light in the darkness. All night the light burned. But Gale turned away with his face to the stone roots of his tree and slept.

Outside a dog prowled uneasily. It snuffled at the doors of the church, and Pepe, waking for a moment, threw a stone at it.

"Vamos!" he admonished sternly. "Accursed infidel!"

But then he too slept again as children sleep. And after a while the cur crept back and lay with its nose between its paws and its mad eyes fixed on the door in an unblinking watchfulness.

II

1

The man and the child on the piebald Shetland pony walked down the lane together. Though the man kept to the outside and had his hand on the bridle, it was evident that the child and pony had him in charge and that they were both gravely aware of their responsibilities. At every unevenness in the road the child touched his arm. "Look out, Unky Baise." And the man smiled and said, "Thanks, old chap," gratefully. But really he knew the way quite well. There wasn't a stone that he didn't know. At a certain place in the lane there was a gap in the tall hedge through which you could look right over the downs to the sea. It was true that the sea and even the near distance were mostly hidden either by clouds or by a haze, very soft and delicate, like a fine veil drawn over a quiet, lovely face. But last night there had been rain and to-day the air would be clear and polished as crystal. The downs themselves would be very vivid. They would have a close-shorn, wind-swept look and a horse and rider standing poised on the crest of one of their high green waves would suddenly let go their hold on life and set out madly together for the world's end with the soft turf ringing under them and the sea wind singing in their ears.

Baise Lindesfarne knew all about that. While he talked quietly to the child he was really remembering what it felt like. "If I could have old Jenny under me, I could risk it," he thought. "Jenny knew the ground better than I did."

"Next autumn I'm going to have a real horse," the child

said. "Mother promised. And I'm to go cubbing with Fitzgerald."

The man smiled in his pleasant way. He was large and rather uncouth both in build and feature. He might have been a working farmer or even a groom. But his shabby tweeds fitted him as though they had been carelessly yet perfectly moulded to his body, and the hand on the bridle was illuminatingly white and delicate.

"Gates, Unky Baise."

They turned in under the beech trees that wore their transparent green like a girl's first party dress. The man lifted his face to their faint shadowy coolness. With his switch he felt along the edge of the carriage drive. It was rough and uneven with weeds, and he told himself that things were going to seed a bit. He wished he could take a hand. And yet in a way he liked things as they were. They were all part of the friendly shabbiness of the big white house in front of him which in turn was rather like himself—rambling and haphazard but with an indefinable air of breeding. No period in particular—dating back probably to the Georges, but without much pretension to style. Like all the Lindesfarnes, for that matter, who were honourable, ordinary people but with something at bottom which made them break out in all sorts of queer ways and places.

They came in at the back entrance because the front of the house had no approach save over the lawns and flower gardens which ran down straight from the French windows and melted almost imperceptibly into the downs. At the door Baise lifted the boy to the ground and hitched the pony to an iron stanchion.

"You run off and find Jerry," he said, "and come in for tea if you feel like it. But remember, you and your mother have got to get me home."

The square hall was already in twilight. Baise avoided a tear in the soft-toned Persian rug and went through a swing

door down a few steps to the smoking room. Most of the things he did nowadays were done instinctively, and mostly they were right. He knew he would find Justine there, hiding herself like a hurt but unbeaten animal in its lair.

It had always been her refuge. Long ago when she and Claire and himself had played together and something had gone wrong between them Justine had fled to the smoking room not to cry but to bury herself in a book or start a fierce battle with the toy soldiers that were her oddly chosen playthings. Justine didn't cry. For the life of him he couldn't remember her crying. She had an almost ferocious pride and courage. No wonder she had made such a gorgeous business of the War—and such a mess of life.

Claire and Baby Jane had been different. You couldn't imagine sisters more unlike—superficially, at any rate. Though there was something underlying the difference that was common to all the Lindesfarnes—sheer quality, you might call it. Claire was very gentle, almost secretive with herself. You felt that she loved reserve for its own sake. Baise's naked love had repelled and frightened her. So that it was quite natural that she should have married Peter, who was a poet and as gentle and reticent as herself. But ridiculous, of course, that Peter should have got himself violently killed at Gallipoli. It was one of these crazy paradoxes that the War had twisted out of the most straightforward people.

Baby Jane had been just a baby. She hadn't counted—one way or another. Not then, at any rate. One didn't think about her.

The smoking room was really a kind of archive of Lindesfarne history. Everything that had ever happened had thrown in a memento of itself. The walls were lined with books that were a clear index to the Lindesfarne mind back over two centuries: law books, travel and hunting books, biographies, histories of military campaigns, treatises on cattle, horses, and dogs with their respective diseases, then Thomas à Kempis,

the *Arabian Nights* (unexpurgated), *The Golden Bough,* and William James's *Varieties of Religious Experience* almost as battered as the standard work on the training of young hounds by a famous M. F. H. The furniture consisted evidently of household oddments and had the bearing of hardened campaigners to whom a few more kicks would make no difference. There were boxes piled up in every available corner, discarded pingpong sets, all sorts of tiresome games invented for Christmas by toy manufacturers, tried out and almost instantly rejected, tennis rackets, fishing tackles and favourite bridles that had been brought in for repairs and left to perish (owing, no doubt, to a certain date in August, 1914). The two square-paned windows were high-placed so that you had to look up to see the sky and the big copper beech that in summer threw a lovely gracious shadow into the room and in winter made delicate designs against the low gray clouds. You couldn't get away from the copper beech for long. But if you wanted to see the garden you had to perch yourself on the window ledge. And it was there that Baise and Justine and Claire and Baby Jane had spent wet afternoons watching the rain lash the garden and the dusk creep up the downs like a stealthy enemy. When they had been quite young they had chattered like sparrows on a branch. But afterward, as they grew older, they had become more and more casual and silent, hiding their bewilderments and astonishments.

It was queer how little Geoff had come into their life together. Of course he had been older, but more than that there had been a sort of feverish preoccupation about him which made them shy with him. It was as though he had always known that he hadn't much time—and had so far to go.

There was really only one comfortable spot in the room—in front of the big fireplace where two deep chairs faced each other across a tigerskin, also somewhat moth-eaten and showing rather too obviously the spot where Colonel Raymond Lindesfarne's accuracy had brought the original owner to

a sudden end. It was like an oasis in a wilderness of disorder which no servant had ever had the courage to tackle. The annual turnout stopped short of the smoking room like a wave thrown back upon itself.

The firelight guided Baise Lindesfarne. He went toward it confidently, avoiding several overturned boxes by a miracle and pausing at the first armchair to hold out a tentative hand. It was grasped for a moment by another hand whose quality had always had the power—since he had been blind—to move him. A brave hand—rather frighteningly brave—at any rate if you yourself were timid and aware of danger.

"Hullo."

"Hullo, old thing."

He dropped down into the opposite chair and sighed and stretched himself.

"Claire told me you were here. She's coming along herself presently."

"Poor Claire! She had to give herself time."

"Well—if you only arrived last night——"

"My dear, don't take up the cudgels. It isn't necessary. I know Claire better than you do. She'll always turn up trumps—but she has to have time, all the same. And I'm a beastly shock——"

He did not deny it and she went on with what she was doing, picking up old letters and papers from the confusion at her feet and dropping them back as though she didn't know what she had ever wanted with them. Baise, with his hands locked behind his head, stared at the fire. He couldn't see it, save as a sort of distant radiance, but he liked the radiance.

"I came on ahead with Peterkins," he explained. "I wanted to see you, and Peterkins seemed to think it high time he gave his grandparents a look over. I sent him off to Jerry. Anybody home?"

"Only me. The others have gone to the Powells' for lunch."

"Why didn't you go?"

"Didn't want to. Besides, I don't fit any more."

"Not being sticky, are they?"

"Not more than they can help, poor angels. But they're happy. And happy people are the devil."

He smiled faintly.

"Used to be rather that way yourself."

"And intend to be so again. But a tummy ache always seems permanent while you've got it. Don't fuss. Tell me about yourself."

"Not much to tell. Just pottering round as usual. Fitzgerald's a real find. Seems to know as much about pigs as he used to know about ballistico. I believe one of these days the farm will positively pay for itself."

"I'm awfully glad, Baise."

"Well—it lets off steam. I can pretend I'm busy and important from dewy morn till dewy eve. I'm positively pompous about how tired I get."

She looked at him. Very intently. It was rather mean—like stealing from someone who had no defence. But she was too lonely to be scrupulous. And besides he was only seemingly at her mercy. When he turned full toward her, showing his scarred face and blank eyes, with a stark frankness she realized how absolutely he hid himself.

"What is it, Justine? What do you want to know?"

"Nothing."

"Can't you ask?"

"Not decently."

"Well—indecently. After all, I'm a cousin."

"As though that made any difference. You wouldn't answer. Perhaps you couldn't."

"As bad as all that?"

"As complicated. I'm awfully mixed myself."

He fished a pipe out from a bulging pocket, and stuffed the bowl with contented, contemplative fingers. Presently he

was smoking quietly, his long legs stretched to the fire, his head thrown back. It was as though he had forgotten her, but she knew he had only accepted her reserve as implicitly as he would expect her to accept his. Her regard became gentler, less penetrating. In that attitude of repose she found a curious pleasure in him. He was square headed and harsh featured. One recognized the yeoman strain, with its affinity to the soil, its rigid codes and deep, narrow visions of life. On the surface neither very clever nor even sensitive. And yet it seemed not out of keeping that he should have lost himself for two years in the wilderness and appeared suddenly, like some gaunt, tattered ascetic, at the recruiting office in Cape Town, only three days late.

He shifted to a more comfortable position.

"Can I ask a question? I don't know whether it's decent or not. But I want to know."

"You can ask."

"Where's Gale?"

"I can't tell you."

"You've no idea?"

"Not the remotest."

"Plans?"

"I'm here for a day or two. Then I'm going up to Half Moon Street. You know Gale gave me the house when he married. I shall stay there until Nat lands."

"So he's coming."

"I cabled for him."

"So that's that."

"That's that."

"What are you doing now?"

"Tidying up. I shan't be here again for a long time. When Nat lands we shall go straight away together."

"But the divorce——"

"Gale will have to get it, then. He wrote me that he would provide me with evidence. That was gentlemanly, of course,

but I'm a gentleman, too, in my way. At least I prefer to stand the racket for my own rottenness."

"Are you rotten, Justine?"

"I don't know. I've knocked my brains silly—I'm tired of thinking about it. If anybody could prove definitely whether I was rotten or not I'd know something about life that I don't know. Anyhow, I wasn't faithful. Not really. And I'm going to Nat just as fast as I can go."

"What's Nat like, by the way? I never met him."

"What's the use of trying to tell you? He's what I want."

"Sure?"

She laughed a little. Questions were stupid. Nobody answered them. Not really. Not even to themselves. Then it flashed into her mind that she wanted Nat as someone dying of fever might crave for water. And very painstakingly and deliberately like a child repeating an imperative message she said:

"I want Nat as a man dying of fever wants water. Does that give you any idea?"

"Some. Of course—this is beastly platitudinous—but my experience is that it isn't wise to drink much when you're as thirsty as all that. You have to go careful."

"You're not careful when you're feverish. You just drink and take your chance. It seems to me that relations between men and women are like that mostly."

"Some of us have to carry our thirst a damn long time," he said.

She paused to look at him again. It was a faint signal from the unknown territory that was Baise Lindesfarne. Perhaps he hadn't meant to make it. One had, after all, to be decent about that sort of thing—not take advantage.

"Nat's been like that," she said rather quickly. "He's wanted me all his life—at least ever since that time in Spain. He was Geoff's friend and Geoff brought him along."

Baise bent over searching for fresh wood for the fire. His

movements were very sure and quiet. He could feel the early spring dusk settling about them and he felt happier.

"I like the dark," he said. "I suppose it's a sort of kinship. I feel myself part of it."

"Baise, I wish we could talk sometimes. We spend our time making noises at one another."

"Well, as long as they aren't nasty, snivelling, whimpering noises, my dear."

"O Lord, why doesn't Claire make up her tiresome mind?"

"She will. One day. Claire has to have time, you know."

"That sounds almost bitter."

"I didn't mean it so."

"You've got every right to feel bitter."

"No, I haven't. It's not Claire's fault that I suffer from a fixation."

"You've been so awfully faithful."

"She didn't ask me to be." He turned his face away from her for a moment. "I've been faithful to myself. That's my affair. I'm not the kind of man who thinks a woman's a pervert of a she-devil because she doesn't fall in love with him when he wants her to. I've been an awful fool with her, all the same. But I'm cleverer than I used to be. You know, I've a theory that we've got too many senses. They get in each other's way. When I could see Claire, I didn't really see her at all. I blundered all over the place like a mad bull. Then the Boche jounced the eyes out of my silly old head and I became a regular sharpshooter. One of these days perhaps I'll hit the bull's-eye. Of course"—he knocked his pipe out against the fender—"I'll always be *'l'un qui baise.'* That's an ordinance of nature."

The old joke raised a little ghostly laugh between them.

"Unky Baise! I wonder what gives our Claire the right to think she can always be *'l'un qui tend la joue.'* "

"Oh, why not? I don't mind. So long as she does give me her cheek—one day and once in a while."

She knew that he was being deliberately and rather painfully confidential—that he was showing his own unhappiness, just to help her. But all the same he would never say the vital things—the things she wanted to know. What was a man really like in his love of women?—a man like Baise with his ravaged face and set, calm mouth? It ought to be easy for men to live. And yet sometimes she suspected that it wasn't so much easier. For them, too, there were complications difficult enough to drive them for years out of sight and hearing of their kind. But even if they talked she wouldn't know for certain, because men and women used the same terms for such different things. They were always misleading each other. It was the same with everyone in different degrees. Sometimes she had a bewildered conviction that no one spoke the same language. They only thought they did. And between men and women it was that much worse.

She hadn't even known about Gale. They had become so utterly shut off from one another. But Gale, in a very splendid sense, was elemental. His roots were the roots of life itself. She could imagine that he would have told her everything that he knew without romance or remorse. He would have felt that there was nothing to be ashamed of so long as one didn't lie about it, at the time or afterward, and pretend it was something that it wasn't. She had known instinctively that he had had his adventures and she had never resented them. She had realized that he took passion in his stride as a laughing, gay thing; an integral part of life, in which one took greedily and gave generously. And then, of course, if one day one met a woman, say on the steps of an old Spanish church—she could imagine the laughter in his eyes—who was one's own kind in body and mind and soul, then life spilled over. One became a god. He had behaved rather like a god that bright spring morning when he had marched her into the registry office and out again as his wife. He had made

a drab performance one of the most colourful romantic things that had ever happened.

Nat was different. He was dark, tormented, contained, but none the less fixed in his purpose. He had frightened her in those first days. She had been like a sleeper on the border of consciousness and troubled by uneasy dreams. She had run away from him because she felt his hungry desire to waken her. And she had been afraid of waking at his hands. It wouldn't be a laughing business, but something terrific and perhaps terrible.

So she had packed a knapsack and without a word had marched off alone—away from herself, if she could get that far. Straight to Gale Braddyl.

It was Baise speaking, rather drowsily:

"I liked Gale. He was awfully lovable. It's been a damnable business."

"I'm damnable, you mean."

"No, I don't. But I was just remembering the first thing I ever heard of him. Aunt Elizabeth wrote me. That was about a week after war broke out. Things were pretty chaotic here. Geoff was just off to join his regiment when up rolled a Rolls-Royce with Gale at the wheel and two baa-lambs with blue bows round their necks occupying the tonneau."

Justine began to laugh. It was quite unbearably funny.

"Aunt Elizabeth said they thought he was some delightful lunatic. He was so charming. He said that he had met you in Spain and that the two sheep were yours and that he had promised to deliver them safely. He added that they were not for consumption and that as they had broken legs only recently mended, Aunt Elizabeth should see to it that they were treated delicately until you arrived yourself to give orders. And then he cleaned out the back of the Rolls-Royce—it needed it, Aunt Elizabeth said—and drove off at top speed. He wouldn't even stay for lunch. He said he had business with the War Office."

Justine pushed the papers aside. What was the use of trying to sort out the past? It was like worrying over spent money. It was all gone anyhow. Much easier and better to make a wholesale bonfire. Yet here, oddly enough, like a ghost risen at an incantation, was the first letter he had ever written her. It bore no superscription. At the time she had realized how gorgeously ominous that deliberate omission had seemed. The letter said briefly that he had delivered Philippe and Isabella as he had promised and that they were in good shape in spite of a tedious journey. The customs had been rather tiresome, not being able to understand why two Spanish sheep with their legs in splints should be treated as War refugees. But he had had pull and it was all right. He added simply: "When I get away from this war business I'm coming for you, darling."

Crazy. Wonderfully crazy. Just on the strength of a night spent together in a Spanish shepherd's hovel with the rain pouring down outside and a herd of bewildered sheep huddled about them, overcoming their dread of human cruelty in order to be near the warmth of Gale's glowing fire. He had been so clever with the two injured lambs. Like a doctor. He had even procured milk for them, and as she fed them he had looked at her with a primitive yet courteous avowal. Oh, she had been wide awake then! But not frightened. Only madly happy.

"And so Philippe and Isabella lived to a ripe old age," she said, "even though we were all dying for a feast of unlimited mutton."

Baise smoked on peacefully.

"I often try to imagine that journey," he said. "You know, the faces of the hotel proprietors and garage men on the way, and all that. They must have thought him perfectly mad. And yet it wasn't mad at all. Really, there was something rather lovely about it—I don't know how to express it—something mediæval and mystical."

"It's funny you should think of it like that," Justine said. "It was like some little piece of carving in Chartres Cathedral —done by an unknown craftsman perhaps when the big architects and artists weren't looking—a lovely little religious joke."

The tears came into her eyes. She threw the letter into the fire with the rest. A clean sweep. But after that she sat huddled together with her face hidden in her arm. She felt that Baise could see her. But she didn't care any more. She was frightfully tired. For a week she had hardly slept at all.

"I don't know whether it's awful or not to think of living people as though they were dead," she said at last. "I can think of Gale and myself as we were then and they seem two such happy, lovely people. But they're gone. They've no connection with the jangling, hateful pair of the last few years. When I think of Gale as he was then I feel I'd die to get back to him again. But when I think of Gale as he is now I don't feel anything at all. I just want Nat—and no one else."

In the deep country silence they heard the crunch of gravel and the pleasant purr of a smoothly running engine. Baise Lindesfarne got up stretching himself.

"The family arrives," he said.

"Stay for tea, Baise."

"Do you want me to?"

"Yes, I do. You're a place of refuge—though I don't in the least know why."

"All right. After that flattery I'll stay."

But he slipped his arm through hers and held her for a moment. She could feel the tense, troubled pressure of his fingers.

"Perhaps—it's because I know," he said quickly.

"Baise——"

"Perhaps you oughtn't to know I know. But it may make it easier. Gale told me himself. He was pretty frantic or he wouldn't have done it."

"No one was to have known—for both our sakes."

"I tell you, he was outside himself. Perhaps my being blind made a difference."

She was silent; her lip caught between her teeth. Then she began to laugh and checked herself with a rough distress.

"My God, what a spectacle! That was a beastly trick to play on me, Baise, dear. I must have been very interesting—positively pathological. But I don't care much. That's how things are with me. You can think what you damn well please."

He pressed her arm closer—rather desperately.

"Never mind my thoughts," he said. "You don't need to. You see—I've had myself to deal with."

2

Little Mr. Powell. Little Mr. Powell talking. So he had come home with them. They'd been sorry for him. They hadn't had the heart to leave him alone in that empty overcrowded house that had become a museum of a dead woman's memories. They had said: "Justine is home for a day or two; Justine will want to see you"—and he had seized pitifully on the chance to talk just a little longer to people who understood what manner of woman Margaret had been. And there he was, cup in hand, standing by the fireside opposite Justine's father and stuttering in his breathless way as though he were afraid that in a moment they would become impatient and not listen to the most vital thing of all.

He must be the ugliest little man in the world, Justine thought—almost monstrous, barely five feet high, with an enormous nose that jutted out of a flaccid face and a wisp of fair hair combed carefully over a bald, odd-shaped head. Yet Margaret, who had been beautiful, had married him. No one understood how it had been possible. And Margaret, who talked very little, had taken the secret of that incredible mating to a sudden, perhaps not tragic, grave.

And she had had wit and talent, too. She had painted—rather well. And some of her poems had been published. And now little Mr. Powell was writing a book about her.

Justine's father and mother listened. They must have heard the story of Mr. Powell's book a dozen times since lunch, but their faces were composed to a courteous attention. Mrs. Lindesfarne said little formal kindly things to him. She sat behind her tea table and her white hands fluttered like moths over the old china.

"I think it's a very lovely idea, Alfred," she said.

She was perfect with him. But then she was always perfect. And, oddly enough, no one ever wearied of her perfection. Her formality was a mould into which she had poured a vivid, passionate spirit. She lifted good manners back to their pinnacle when they had been an integral part of courage. When Geoff Lindesfarne had been killed in action she had gone about her hospital work with her usual smiling, somewhat aloof friendliness and no one had dared break in on that stoic conception of a well-bred woman's attitude toward tragedy. In those days her faultless dressing, the carefully manicured hands, had moved people already hardened. For they knew that Geoff had been her life.

Yet she was curiously without artifice. Her worn yet lovely façade made no pretensions. If she carried her slender, graceful figure like a girl and dressed it with an expensive good taste, it was from a deeply ingrained habit of life, and her small-featured Dresden-china face exposed its lines calmly and indifferently. Her pose was her idea of her duty toward her neighbour and herself. Even with a disastrous headache which only her husband suspected, she could keep that look of untroubled attention, and all her movements were beautiful and serene. Presently she would go quietly to her room and lock her door. But even then she would maintain an unbroken front. Pain and death might overtake Elizabeth Lindesfarne, but they could never cause her indignity.

To her children she was a baffling figure. Her husband gave her an almost fantastic adoration.

Clive Lindesfarne himself was of a different metal. As he leaned against the mantelshelf, smiling at little Mr. Powell, he looked like an elderly, Sixteenth-Century pirate who had not left his swashbuckling days far behind him. The close-cropped beard and thick gray hair flung back from a fine adventuring forehead made the teacup and the severe dress of a country gentleman something of an anachronism. The sword and the tankard attended him like ghosts of a regretfully vanished past. His eyes danced to meet Justine. They loved each other. Sometimes Justine felt sure that he wanted to tell her secret things about himself, but gave it up either because it was too difficult or out of some sense of loyalty. Not that he wasn't happy. And he was still wildly in love with his Elizabeth. Anyone could see that. All the same there were things in life that Elizabeth Lindesfarne wouldn't countenance—ridiculous, harebrained things—and which conceivably his daughter might understand. The fact that she had his own fiery red-brown eyes might make him think so.

The maid, rustling with clean linen, set the four-tiered cake stand at Mrs. Lindesfarne's elbow. The door closed softly. Everything was very dim and quiet. For a hundred years there had been flowers in this room—daffodils and sweet peas and roses and chrysanthemums in their turn—and the very walls were steeped in their dead sweetness. The firelight danced soberly in the mellow surfaces of the Chinese Chippendale cabinets. No one had bothered to turn on the other lights. So that you could imagine things. You could imagine Gale curled up in his favourite chair with his hand clasping his knee—smiling bitterly.

Outside the garden peered through the windows like an exiled, forsaken playfellow. It wore a gray mantle of mist and the drip of moisture mingled with the crackle of burning wood and the ghostly tinkle of china.

Justine thought of a church where people were happy and at home. She found herself remembering the little Church of the Virgin. Perhaps every race had its peculiar sanctuary and its peculiar hour when it came nearest its own genius. By this suave and gracious ritual some native English virtue was maintained. She felt that they were all released and comforted by it. She had a sense of some deep spring of life welling up among them.

Little Mr. Powell talked, holding her hand in his tight, hot grasp as though he were clinging to her for help.

"Too bad, isn't it, dear Mrs. Braddyl? But everyone's so kind to me. When I heard you were here I couldn't resist coming to see you. I'm positively ashamed. But it's lonely in that big house since Margaret's gone. I can hardly endure it sometimes. Yet if it wasn't for my book——"

He began to tell her about the book. He stuttered and gasped asthmatically. It was the saddest, most pitiable business, Justine thought. Margaret couldn't have loved him. And yet no one could have bought Margaret. There was some mystery. When you stopped to really think about human beings, your head whirled.

"—for private circulation only—just some of her pictures—the poems she loved best—extracts from her letters. You have no idea what letters she wrote. There was one from Venice—just after she had been so ill—one of the loveliest letters. No one knew her as I did. But people ought to know. That's how I feel about it. They ought to know that there has been such a perfect soul among them."

Justine wasn't quite listening. Something queer had happened. Baise, who had been out stabling Peterkins' pony, had come in behind her with Peterkins in hand, and now stood irresolute, suddenly not quite sure of himself. It was as though something unexpected had confused him. There was Claire 'way back in the shadow of her big chair—pensive and frail with her ash-blonde hair and gray eyes under dark brows. And

there was Baby Jane. She sat cross-legged by the fire at her father's feet. She was like some slender, deep red flower—a very young flower with close-drawn petals. She wore her hair after the fashion of a mediæval page and under the square, flat fringe was a childish copy of her mother's features—small, resolute, and passionate.

And as Baise came in Baby Jane and Claire had both looked up, and it was then that the something queer had happened. A pause had set in—even Mr. Powell had faltered. It seemed to Justine that it lasted a long time. You couldn't say that anybody's expression had changed. Only that Baise turned his face toward Baby Jane, slowly, inevitably, and that Claire looked away into the fire.

Peterkins tore himself free.

"Buns!" he said triumphantly.

They laughed. He became for a moment the focus of their secret conflicts. Justine glanced involuntarily at Baise. It was horrid. It was like spying. But it concerned her. Suddenly she found herself detesting his affectionate good-natured acceptance of the child. Did he enjoy imagining Claire in the arms of that faded poet? Or hadn't he got any imagination? Or wasn't he lover enough? Or was she crazy about the whole business?

Mrs. Lindesfarne thought with calm agony of Geoff, who had loved buns and whom once, on the score of some lovable boyish escapade, she had cruelly denied. She touched Baise on the arm and gave him his tea, and he smiled down at her. Even mentally he didn't see her. Poor headstrong, bedevilled Justine. Children. He hadn't thought of it from that angle. But suddenly as he had come into the room it had broken over him like a wave—a thing that he had fought to a standstill—a warm, primitive urge that gave him a consciousness of Justine that he had not had even in that close intimacy. God—what a wretched business! What were children to women, anyhow? Not just the outcome of a transitory and perhaps meaning-

less physical act, but something so knotted in their own roots that relations between themselves and men—even a relationship so vital and significant as that between Justine and Gale—might go by the board? He turned his face involuntarily to meet her hostile scrutiny. She leaped on his thought and her anger against him became violent, irrational. She wanted to strike the pity out of that pitiable face. She wanted to say aloud to him: "Don't be a sentimental fool. Don't lie about me."

To Baby Jane, Peterkins was merely the sudden revelation of a resentment. Baby Jane. She was sick of it. She was sick of being treated like a child. She wasn't a child any more. She knew that. Even if Baise didn't. Or perhaps he did. He had turned his face toward her as though he really saw her for the first time. Peterkins fidgeted restlessly on the hearth and she gave him a little impatient push. He annoyed her with his robust greediness. She disapproved of it. She wished Claire would exercise more control. But Claire only looked at the boy with a slightly troubled expression. Peter the elder had become a shadow. She couldn't quite believe in that faint lover or in this tumultuous product of a far-off tentative wooing. It was as though she had been asleep. And just now, as Baise came in, something had startled her awake and she felt stupidly distressed and frightened.

Clive Lindesfarne shook Peterkins' head by its thick, fair mop. He liked being grandfather to this earthy, pugnacious little animal. And he enjoyed the joke on Claire and the refined Peter. All the same, if Peterkins grew up without someone to put the brake on there'd be the devil to pay. Fortunately he was there for the time being, and perhaps Baise would be allowed to carry on the good work—if Claire had any sense, which he doubted. Baise was a man even if he was an obstinate, besotted ass. Meantime, as grandfather, Clive had done his bit in the way of discipline. He had seen to it that Peterkins had shaken hands all round with an agonized punc-

tiliousness before he reached the buns, toasting brown and succulent on the hearth.

Mr. Powell blinked into the fire. If there had been a child—— But that was monstrous—as monstrous as himself. Blasphemous. He clasped his hands together. He was begging her to forgive him.

Their thoughts tossed backward and forward.

"—just writing about her in my poor way comforts me," said Mr. Powell.

It was rather dreadful the way he talked. Mrs. Lindesfarne's small masked face smiled at him. She had the infinite toleration of her good breeding.

"If it comforts you Margaret would have wished it," she said, "for that was all that Margaret cared about."

He nodded eagerly. And it was true, Justine thought with an impatient scorn. Just lived to make this hideous, fussy little egomaniac happy. And then died. As though she just couldn't go on. Justine glanced at her mother curiously. The two women weren't alike in anything save their reticence and their beauty, which they held between themselves and life like a shield. And yet Elizabeth Lindesfarne had spoken with a faintly tender knowledge.

Mr. Powell had taken Justine's hand again. He loved holding people's hands. It was beastly and pathetic.

"I've talked too much about myself. I ought to go. Really—I am going—*tout de suite*. Please forgive me. Dear Mrs. Braddyl, I'd hoped Gale would be coming, too, but they tell me he has to go abroad."

Justine looked from one to the other. So they hadn't told him. She wondered why not. They hated the whole business, of course, and perhaps they didn't really believe in it. Sometimes she didn't quite believe in it either. And they would judge life by themselves. Nothing could have come between them—not even the thing that had come between her and Gale. They belonged to a generation that mastered many of

the worst torments simply by not acknowledging them. Justine couldn't imagine her mother even admitting to herself that she might suffer in just that way. But Justine's generation had its own courage—or its recklessness.

"Gale won't be coming down here again, Mr. Powell," she said. "You see, we've left each other for good."

Mrs. Lindesfarne sat very quiet with her hand shading her face from the firelight. Her husband flashed one of his impish glances at her. It was as though he said, "You see what comes of bottling people who won't be bottled." Claire and Baby Jane looked at their sister and then at Baise, who stood outside the circle, his disrupted face somehow emphasizing the strength of the great uninjured body.

"My dear, my dear." Mr. Powell let go her hand, trembling. "I can't believe it. It's too bad, too bad. It would have made Margaret so unhappy. She loved you both so—and you two—so young, so handsome, so much in love. Oh, no, it's terrible. I won't believe it—the world seems to be falling about my ears." He made a distracted gesture with his grotesque hands. "Dear, dear Mrs. Braddyl, don't let some quarrel—some little thing—spoil anything so perfect."

She smiled down at him. She felt suddenly much older than anyone there, except Baise, who knew.

"It wasn't a little thing—to us," she said.

He fluttered timorously. He said good-bye. It was cruel to have made the little man so unhappy. She went with him to the door, where the big car waited in the mist to take him home.

"It's all my fault," she said. "Please believe that, because it's true. Gale couldn't help it. I failed him—rottenly. If he'd married anyone else it would have been all right. It's just me. Don't let it distress you."

He pressed her hand. He was almost crying.

"I don't believe it's anyone's fault. *C'est la vie—la vie.* I'm

only glad Margaret didn't know. She loved beautiful things. It was ugliness that killed her."

In the drawing room Baise had rescued Peterkins from the buns. He gave Peterkins his large silk handkerchief on which to wipe his greasy paws.

"And now we'll take each other home, young man," he said. "Anyone coming along?"

He listened, with his head a little on one side, as though something important hung on the answer.

"I want to talk to Justine," Claire said coldly. "I'll come on in the car later."

Jane rose lithely to her feet.

"And I want a stroll. Do you mind, Baise?"

He turned his blind face from Claire.

"I should say not."

She went with him, her arm through his, and a moment later Claire rose abruptly and slipped out after them. The room sank back into its native peace. Clive Lindesfarne came over to his wife's chair and perched himself on its arm.

"These poor young friends of ours!" he said. "They haven't any of our dear old-fashioned gods left to help them. It must be hard going. Don't be angry, beloved."

"I'm not angry."

He bent and kissed her. "Well—whatever you are," he said.

3

When Justine came to her bedroom she found Claire waiting for her. The window was wide open and the cold air stole in soft-footed as the young moon ascending out of a sea of mist. Justine sat opposite Claire on the broad window sill, but for a time they did not speak to one another. The silent whiteness beneath them in which the familiar shapes of trees and hedges hung motionless like monstrous sleeping fish made them feel

unreal and uncertain. They were ghosts, too, haunting their old meeting place. Life had passed on. Only yesterday they had slept in this room as children and had confided in one another as schoolgirls—had laughed and made plans together. Everything had been secure and fixed for all time. Christmas and birthdays and going to school and coming home again. They had never lived before, so they hadn't known that life didn't go on like that—that it didn't go on at all. They couldn't believe how much lay in the past already—finished and done with—the long struggle of the War, playfellows snuffed out one after another like candles, even to Geoff, marriage and birth, people coming together and being torn asunder. Ten years. Why, before one could be sure one was alive at all it would be all over. One would be dead, too.

Justine shivered. Not because she was cold.

"Where's Jane?"

"Gone along with Baise and Peterkins."

"Why didn't you go? He wanted to see you."

"We see each other every day. Besides, I wanted to talk."

"Don't talk about Gale. Do you mind?"

"But, Justine, one must. We've always talked about everything."

"Not really. About dances—not about anything that mattered."

"Can't you now?"

"It wouldn't be any use."

"Not to you, perhaps."

Justine fumbled for a packet of cigarettes on her dressing table.

"To whom then?"

"Oh, I don't know. Life's so difficult. One doesn't understand. One makes such hideous mistakes. I felt sure that you at least were all right. And now this dreadful thing happens."

"To Gale and me? Yes, it is dreadful."

"And this Nat person."

"No use abusing him. We're in love with each other. When I can I'll marry him."

"You were in love with Gale."

"Madly."

Claire leaned her head against the lintel. She looked pale and fantastic as the moon. And suddenly Justine felt sorry and wanted to take her in her arms as she had done that night, long ago, when Claire had come home from a party, crying and trembling, because some love-sick boy had kissed her. But there was something inside Justine that didn't allow her to be gentle or tender with anyone.

"So it doesn't last."

"You know about that as well as I do."

"You mean—about Peter? Somehow that doesn't help me to know. Sometimes I think I wasn't really in love. It's so hard. Everyone is so alone in what they feel. Ellen, the new housemaid, says she's in love. But she doesn't mean what you and Gale meant."

Justine laughed to herself.

"I don't know. Perhaps she'll make a better thing of it than I did. One's so conceited about one's love."

"Oh, no—no—when I saw you that day after Gale married you I knew that something extraordinary had happened. I knew I didn't know anything about life."

"It was such a little time," Justine said. "Just those few hours. In the evening he was gone again. They couldn't spare anyone in those days."

"What was it like, Justine, to care for anyone like that?"

Justine's cigarette threw a faint red on the white knuckles of her hand.

"You mean—to be passionately in love?"

"Yes—I suppose I mean that."

"You ask such funny, difficult questions."

"Try to answer them, won't you? I'm so puzzled. Frightened. I think I've always been rather frightened."

Claire didn't want to know about Justine and Gale. She wanted to know about herself. That made it that much easier. Justine answered steadily.

"I was frightened once. Only once. In Madrid. Nat kept on looking at me—following me with his eyes. No one had ever looked at me like that before. Or I hadn't felt it. I was horrified. I hated myself. I felt sick and dirty all over. I had to get away. But with Gale I forgot everything. He could look at me as he pleased. And I could look back at him. A sort of war had come to an end. I was reconciled—to life, to what was me and human. I can't make you understand. It sounds so stupid."

"No—no, it doesn't. Don't mind talking to me—please, please, Justine, darling."

"Well, that's about all there is to it."

"But that night—in the shepherd's hut—I've wondered so often——"

"I couldn't tell you. We hardly talked at all. It was a sort of mystery—you know—the poor funny sheep staring at us and the firelight and the rain outside. I'd run away from him—because I couldn't bear myself—I couldn't bear anyone. But he came after me. And it was all right. I couldn't have believed that another human being could have understood as he did. Anyone else would have thought I was crazy—standing there in the rain and cursing those wretched shepherds—but he didn't. He didn't say, 'There's nothing we can do. The people here don't understand our point of view and they suffer enough themselves.' He went into the fight, head down. Just as though this were the only cruel thing that had ever happened and of course we had to set it right. But what's the use? It's all over now."

Claire shook her head.

"I can't believe it—that anything so lovely——"

"It was lovely. There were whole days of our life together that were quite perfect. We should have died—like Romeo

and Juliet. Then we should never have known that perfection is only perfect for its moment. Life goes on. That's the trouble with it."

"Oh, I know. The War—the beastly, beastly War."

"It wasn't altogether beastly, Claire. Not for everyone. Not for me. I wouldn't have missed my share."

"But if you were thinking of Gale——"

"I was thinking of him. All the time. That was the splendid part of it."

The silence drifted between them on the mist. Justine forgot Claire. She was saying good-bye to Gale on the little Spanish railway station. He was holding her hand and saying gravely: "It sounds as though we were going home to a grand old row. But it won't make any difference." He hadn't explained what he meant. He hadn't needed to. There was a World War on and Gale Braddyl and Justine Lindesfarne loved each other. That was enough to steady them for what lay ahead, the chaotic homecoming, the breakdown of their world, the passage of their people through torment and death to a new, bewildering life. She hadn't seen Gale again for nearly four years. Most of that time she didn't know whether he was alive or dead. Within a year she was with her canteen in Serbia. She parked her old Ford truck by the roadside while the retreat flowed past her through the blinding snow—women and children and peasants and broken-down carts and spectral horses and tatterdemalion soldiers with stark horror in their fixed eyes. For so long as her stores lasted she fed them. But they didn't last long. Her companion had been taken ill and had gone on with a passing ambulance. She was all alone. The old Ford wouldn't start. It had just died like a lot of other worn-out faithful people by the wayside. She remembered standing there and looking at its rusty battered body and thinking, "Now I am really up against it." She hadn't been frightened at all. Probably Gale was dead long since. If so she would die too and be glad of it. And if he was alive

she would go on with her job, as he was doing, without fuss or complaint, and come through to be with him. She was completely fatalistic about it. All through the three days' march, caught like a piece of driftwood in a slowly moving tide of human agony, she held fast to her conviction. Her dying body clamoured to join the wreckage cast up on either hand and composed in the ashen tranquillity of surrender. Every step seemed inevitably the last. But because it wasn't she knew that Gale was still alive. On the third day they came to a small town where the stream swirled back upon itself. She was light-headed by this time. She remembered nothing clearly. But she had a picture of herself standing at the corner of a snow-blocked street with the glacial wind searing her flesh and everything in her broken save the will to live. A young Serbian officer came to her and took her by the arm. She couldn't see his face. It was too dark. From first to last she didn't think they ever spoke to each other. He took her to a peasant's hut crowded with refugees and found a corner for them both. There was a candle burning under a faded icon, but still she could not see his face, for it was bandaged except for the eyes that seemed fixed forever on an unimaginable grief. He crouched down beside her and put his arms about her and covered them both with his long cloak. The awful cold yielded to their combined warmth. She dozed feverishly and dreamed that it was Gale who held her. At dawn she woke to find herself alone with the Serbian officer's cloak still wrapped about her shoulders. She had it now—there, in her wardrobe, mud-stained and colourless. She kept it as a testimony to what seemed even more now than then a mystical adventure.

After that she had been like someone driven and upheld by an inspiration. She had become the heart of an heroic nucleus which the distracted mob followed with a blind, increasing faith. Even in those few days a legend began to grow about her which would persist through the ages in the songs and stories

of the people. It was absurd. She could laugh at herself—at the pictures of Justine Lindesfarne as a legendary figure. But not at the force that had possessed her. The decoration that the Serbian General had pinned to her breast honoured not her, but the amazing visitation.

"I never took what the War had to give," Claire was saying tragically. "I shut myself off. I thought I was indignant, but really I was frightened. I don't know of what—not of death or pain, but of something in myself. I think I've always been frightened"—she broke off and added in a low voice—"of loving anyone."

Justine laughed.

"I don't understand that."

"No. You're so different. Isn't it queer that we're sisters? Weren't you frightened—of Gale?"

"Never."

"Couldn't you tell me what you thought?"

"Everything and nothing."

"Your home with him—and—and children."

"Oh, heavens—no! Just Gale. I wanted him—terribly—as he wanted me. I never thought about anything else—just to be in his arms——"

"Justine——"

"It shocks you. I could shock you a great deal more. I'm through with pretence."

"The whole thing has always shocked me."

"It does everyone—at first—when you find you're not such a high-minded, spiritual creature after all, but just a muddle of instincts and desires with a lot of copybook precepts in charge. With Gale it did seem different—a sort of reconciliation between the flesh—and—and whatever else there is of us."

"It was different, darling; it must have been."

Justine did not answer. Her silence was weighted with an ironic amusement, and that drove Claire back into herself.

"Peter was so gentle. Just to be together, he said. I think, in a way, he was frightened, too. We thought it would be all right—like going on with a dream."

"Poor Baise——"

"I know. But it's been different lately. He's been different. So quiet and patient. He doesn't frighten me any more."

"Marry him then. He's waited long enough, poor devil."

"It's this being a coward, Justine. I do love him. Perhaps I always have. But I knew it to-night for the first time. But then—you and Gale—you can't tell, can you?"

Justine slipped from her seat. She put her hand over Claire's with a hard, strong pressure.

"You can't tell anything, my dear. It's ridiculous the way we play for safety in this world where none of us are safe for five minutes together. Might as well go out with flags flying and take a chance. Gale and I thought we were safe. We might die, of course. But that was the worst that could happen. We didn't exactly deceive ourselves. But we were human and the gods had a fine time pointing the fact out to us. Perhaps, if you lie low and don't make any extravagant claims about yourself, they'll let you alone."

"Justine, what was it, dear?"

"Oh, just rows. The sort of thing you read of in divorce proceedings and which sound so comic. Getting on each other's nerves—quarrelling about everything and nothing."

"There must have been more than that."

"Oh, yes. Of course. That was all on the surface. Underneath was the fact that I'd fallen in love with Nat."

"Justine——"

"Beastly, wasn't it? But I had."

"You didn't love Gale any more?"

Justine took Claire by the shoulders.

"Go out and marry Baise. Don't ask questions I can't answer. Be happy. Don't be a little funk."

"I'd like to make him happy. Do you think I could? Do you think he still cares?"

"What do you want him to do? Die at your feet?"

Claire laughed a little. She put her small cool face against Justine's burning cheek with a shy, affected childishness.

"I'll try to be awfully, awfully brave," she said.

4

They left Peterkins and his pony at Claire's cottage where Nanny and the gardener waited to receive them both. Peterkins was very sleepy with buns. Baise had had to hold him in the saddle and carry him from the gate to the door.

"When I'm grown up I'm going to be a soldier like Unky Baise," Peterkins declared out of a dream. "And there's going to be the biggest war there ever was and I'm going to be in it and kill lots and lots of wicked people."

Baise laughed and freed himself from a sticky embrace.

"That comes of being the son of a pacifist and a poet," he said.

He walked back with Baby Jane down the garden path between the fuchsia bushes. Usually it hurt him to turn his back on Claire's cottage. The faint smell of flowers and burning wood twisted his heart like an old tune in the ears of an exile. He had never seen her cottage with his eyes, for she had come to it after Peter's death to be near her people. But he knew that it was small and had low, dark-beamed ceilings and was full of pretty things and soft timid colours—like Claire herself. It seemed to him there was nothing in her—no ebb and flow of emotion that he hadn't felt in his own blood. He had even understood her fear of him and had been pitying and patient. But it had hurt all the same, always turning away like this. And to-night he was conscious of a faint anger against her. She had no right to speak to him with that aloof

coldness. He had done nothing. He was not such a fool that he didn't know that he had been more faithful to her than he himself would have thought possible. He had shut himself in a prison and thrown away the key. Sometimes he was overtaken by a dread fear that even if she wished it he could never find it again—that there was nothing left of him but the capacity to endure.

Baby Jane held his arm pressed warmly, companionably against her side. With the back of his hand he could feel her ribs and the strong beat of her heart under the little breast. Maturity lay over her delicate bones like a fine veil.

"And now I suppose I've got to see you home," he said.

"You won't. I'm coming with you. I want a walk. And besides, you're a poor blind man and can't see your way in the dark."

He smiled down at her. They both knew that across his own fields he would be the better guide of the two and to him the night made no difference. It worried him a lot less if people spoke openly of his blindness and even teased him about it. Then he didn't feel an outsider. Jane had always known this, and what seemed sometimes her rather brutal directness was really the measure of her understanding. She had courage herself and a curious awareness of pain that was part of the something indignant and challenging about her youth. To tilt with windmills on behalf of any ill-used wayfarer would seem to Jane Lindesfarne a natural human enterprise. And to-night she was in a high fighting mood. Baise did not know the cause—only that her militant anger made her glad to be with him and made him glad to be with her. Even across the fields she insisted on walking beside him, though the path was too narrow and they jostled each other into the long, wet grass.

"I love it," he said. "But I oughtn't to let you come so far, Baby Jane."

"My name's not Baby Jane from to-night on," she retorted

with a threatening restraint. "It's not funny any more, and I've had enough of it. I'm a woman. I've got a grown-up woman's feelings. If you don't believe it I'll tell you about them and then you'll know."

"That sounds shocking. If you're going to tell me you're in love, in modern language, I shall leave you at the next stile."

"Don't be clever. And if I am in love, why shouldn't I be?"

"You should be. And when you are, you'll go into it with your head down—like Justine."

"But I shouldn't come out of it like Justine. I'd stay in."

"I believe you would. Lucky for him."

"And don't be commonplace either," she admonished impatiently.

"But I am commonplace. I say commonplace things all the time. And what's more, I mean them."

"All right—if you really can't help it. But I'm serious and I won't be treated like an idiot."

"Like a child, Jane."

"That's worse."

"It's stupid of us. But perhaps it's because we want to think there are still young unhurt people in this world."

"Then you're pulling your own leg. There aren't any young people—not the kind you mean. I daresay there never will be again. And we aren't unhurt. We're worse hurt than you are because we haven't had the fun——"

"O Lord, the fun!"

"Humbug! It was fun. It's always fun to smash things. We're left with the dirty mess."

After a moment he said:

"I daresay you're right. Don't hate us, though."

"You're not a separate part of the universe. You're us and we're you. It's this dividing people up that makes me so mad. We're just as brave as you were and just as unhappy and much more muddled."

"You know, Jane, if that's true, I'm pig enough to be glad.

One has the illusion of being cut off by experience from the rest, and it's damn lonely——"

"You're not alone, Baise, darling."

"You say that because you're dear and generous."

"Oh, to hell with my generosity! You'll call me a dear little woman in a moment and then I'll kick you."

"I won't. And don't kick. I've had enough of that. Be nice to me."

"I'm trying. Don't make it so difficult." But she had recovered her good humour. As the path widened she swung along beside him with a dancing freedom. "Let's talk about Gale and Justine. I'm bursting with rage about it all. And there's no one to burst over. I can't over Justine. I ought to, but I can't. She looks so damn reckless. But wait till that Nat Wynne comes down—the precious new brother-in-law. I'll give him hell—though he's probably such a devil he won't notice it."

"Anyway, I don't think you'll get the chance. Justine won't do a thing like that."

"I don't know what Justine won't do. I don't understand her any more. I don't approve of her. In fact, I don't approve of either of my sisters." She broke into a gay laugh. "That shows how young I am, doesn't it? All right—if you don't want to talk about Justine, shall I tell you what the world looks like to-night? Perhaps you know. It's wonderful, anyhow. The moon's risen—a young, absurd moon like me—and the mists have crept down into the valley and fallen asleep. We two are throwing such long, long shadows on the grass."

"The mists will be bad in Colen Deep," he said uneasily. "I wish we hadn't left Claire. She's such a rotten driver."

"Oh, heavens, nothing will happen to Claire! She's not the sort to get hurt. Don't you know even that?"

"I'd be glad to know it."

"I daresay. It would be a good thing for everybody if you did and could take your mind off her for five minutes. Just try."

"All right. I'm trying."

Suddenly he felt happy and light-hearted. He had subdued his tempo—the very colour of his thoughts—for so long that this truant throwing off of restraint made him feel a little drunk. He caught Jane by the hand and began to whistle an ironic version of the Marseillaise, and Jane joined in with her high, clear treble. The sound seemed to linger above them in the misty emptiness like the echo of a skylark's singing.

"Nearly home, Baise."

The dark, straggling mass of the old farmhouse lay at the bottom of the hill. Not a light showed. He didn't know, of course, but it made her blood boil to think how comfortless and alone he was.

"I'm coming in and I'm going to build up the fire and get your supper," she said. "You poor, forsaken old derelict."

"You won't. Maggie's there to do all that. Besides, it's too late. High time you were home. Good-night, old thing."

She did not quarrel with him as he had half expected. She stood close to him. He could hear her quick breathing, for they had come down the hill at a run, hand in hand. He could feel her warmth and he held the gate doggedly against her. She was an obstinate, reckless young thing. At the bottom of his heart he wanted her to come in. He dreaded the silence of the dark, chill rooms. He wanted to go on listening to her. And once she put her foot inside he wouldn't have the strength.

He heard her laugh. It was a subdued, private laugh, oddly compounded of pain and anger and gaiety. Her hands caught the lapels of his coat.

"Well, it shan't be Unky Baise this time anyhow," she said.

And kissed him swiftly on either cheek and was gone.

III

1

The stones were penetratingly cold. They were colder than death—much colder than earth on which Gale had slept well and often. The earth was like an old hearth that beneath its shell retained the memory of burnt-out fires. But these stones had been dead too long.

Gale lifted himself on his elbow. He was aware of noiseless changes that had taken place about him as he slept. A man's black-robed figure had been blocked out against the bright doorway of the sacristy. He sat with his back to Gale, bowed over a table, and his *birreta* threw a quaint shadow on the white wall beyond him. When he moved there was a ghostly rustle as of leaves stirred by a faint wind. The single light at the Virgin's feet had grown stronger in measure as the night had settled more profoundly under the arches and in the deep recesses of the side altars. She herself had emerged from the shining mystery of her clouds and her appeal had become immediate and personal. There was a menace in her austere insistence and Gale knew why Pepe had been afraid and had escaped into the safety of the open night.

Gale settled himself sullenly against the stone pillar behind him. The first deep sleep of exhaustion was over. His aching body would not let him sleep again. It left him to an abnormal consciousness. He was at the very nadir of that quotidial circle where the realities lie without their daylight disguise, stark naked and unescapable. Death was there—his own death. That in itself was neither very new nor important. But it

wasn't the death to which he had grown accustomed and which to the end had retained a quality of fantasy. It revealed itself to him as an immeasurable loneliness—as the faltering of his own heart, the darkening and dissolution of his own personality.

Life was there. Which was less bearable. Gale couldn't dismiss it now with a sweeping gesture of renunciation. The curtain might fall on a dramatic last act. But that unfortunately was never really the end of it—neither for the actors nor the audience. On both sides of the curtain the days continue their march one behind another, goose-stepping with horrible Prussian-like discipline—so many meals to eat, so many times to sleep and wake, dress and undress, so many hourly decisions to make—the whole futile paraphernalia of life unlit by one decent illusion.

The past was there. People who talked about it as a place of refuge had nothing to escape from. Either it meant nothing—no more than a mouldering tombstone—or it was a place of torment. Mostly it meant nothing. The old Gale Braddyl of the Lost Days, for instance, with his faultless clothes, his excellent polo ponies and his ephemeral love affairs, meant nothing. Or at most he called up a brief poignant memory—illusive as a perfume—of London on some spring night; of two young men in evening dress, gallantly coatless, their opera hats imperceptibly tilted, sauntering down from the Albany to the Haymarket—a graceful, charming pair, well built, well groomed, well satisfied, taking life and themselves amiably for granted.

"How's La Belle Henriette, Gale?"

"Henriette? Let's think. Oh, you're behind the times, old man. We kissed and parted two days ago."

Laughter. They thread their way in and out of the good-humoured crowd. They'll be ten minutes late for the first act. But who cares? Nothing happens in the first act anyway.

After the theatre a stroll down Pall Mall to St. James's.

Ralph goes on duty at the Palace at midnight. They talk idly of the show—of the people they know there—plans for next autumn's shooting—the whole perfectly established order of things.

Ralph was dead. And Gale, too, for that matter. So dead that the thought of him didn't raise a stir.

But there were living things——

The copper beech at Whiteladies would be showing its first leaves by now. English trees were deep-rooted and constant. Wars or no wars, they kept their steady course of life unbroken. They kept themselves ready, perhaps, so that Englishmen dying wheresoever on foreign soil could at the last moment come back to them and find them, dressed in their season's colour, waiting and unchanging.

French trees were terrible. In war time they suffered and died like men. They were more terrible than dead men. There was a forest behind Mons which was like a battalion of damned souls twisted into shapes of static agony. The isolated trees were worse. There was one that Gale had never forgotten. It rose out of the midst of a ploughed field, its convulsed, naked arms tossed to heaven in a gesture of anguish and reproach.

March, 1918. Spring in Regent Street. There were paradoxes the human understanding simply couldn't make sense of—how, for instance, you could be walking down Regent Street in the sunshine among other free, apparently untroubled people, apparently free and untroubled yourself, rather a handsome fellow in your new uniform and high brown boots. And to-night you would saunter casually into an unlit leave-train with other well-dressed, good-looking fellows and amid amiable chatter be carried off to a not far distant, predestined spot—queer to realize that the gods had already chosen it for you—where you would be messed up beyond recognition. It was happening to other amiable, good-looking fellows at

that very moment. If, by a miracle, the great city could be induced to stand still and listen, it might hear the boom of their destruction. It would be still more difficult then to make sense of anything—to bring into some sort of relation those shreds and tatters of men and this order, this calm going-about-one's-business.

March, 1918. Gale looked back derisively into the holy face bending down to him from its aureole of gold. The Virgin might embody heaven-knew-what mystic wisdom. She didn't know about March, 1918. So she was out of court. Trains congested by men in full equipment, stepping doggedly into the slippery tracks of men who had ceased to be men. Crowded theatres. Jazz. Jokes about the next war. Men dancing through their last night. The scream of shells. The tinkle of a bell as the Piccadilly bus draws up to the curb. Gasps and groans of men who can't quite die. Girls in neat uniforms, calm and good-humoured, helping passengers on and off—their thoughts God knows where. "Piccadilly—Westminster—Old Kent Road—fares, pliz." An incredible mix-up!

And all these things in Gale Braddyl's head. Outwardly a cool young veteran with bright ribbons on the breast of his new tunic. Going out like a bridegroom. Not expecting to come back. That made it easier in a queer way. It settled things. He had had three years of it without a scratch. And though the gods might play their funny game with you for a long time, in the end they always got sick of it.

In his pocket he carried a license to marry one Justine Lindesfarne, spinster, twenty-two years old, of Whiteladies Manor, Ketten, Dorset. He bought a new license every time he came home on leave and went down to Dorset by the first train. Winter or spring or summer, nothing fundamental ever changed there. The white house on the downs and the copper beech waited patiently for their people to come home. Mr. Lindesfarne—temporary Captain Lindesfarne—was bucca-

neering on a trawler somewhere in the North Sea. Mrs. Lindesfarne at her hospital. Claire at Peter's place in Wales, absorbed in her infant; Justine in Serbia. Only once Gale met Jane, back from school, and she had taken him down to the paddock and shown him Philippe and Isabella, disgustingly old and fat and ungrateful. They didn't even recognize him. But Jane was very kind.

"They've decorated Justine on the field," she said. "A Spread Eagle of the something-or-other class of the Serbian something-or-other order. I'm not sure. But she's awfully brave."

"I know," he said.

They had tea together under the copper beech—bread and margarine and, to celebrate the occasion, some pre-war strawberry jam. And Gale had been very happy, for listening to Jane was like listening to Justine's voice a long way off. Jane told him how beastly it was to be cooped up in a school where you couldn't even hope for an air raid, and Gale gave her his version of the Philippe and Isabella incident. He also explained why he didn't write.

"You see, you can love a person desperately and sincerely for what they are and yet superficially not know them well at all. My letters might worry her. They might spoil things."

Jane said she understood that quite well. Whenever she tried to explain anything in a letter there was a row. So she had given it up, confining herself to brief statements as to her health and finances.

Afterward she walked with him to the station and gave him the only kind of sympathy he could accept, which was silent, and took the unlikelihood of his coming back for granted.

(Justine—Justine——)

The Virgin with the elderly, solemn-faced child seemed to move slightly in their mysterious light. The child's fingers admonished with severity. Gale jibed at them both. Where—in what obscure corner had they tucked the wretched Joseph

this time? Yet Joseph was flesh and blood. He had his share of the tragedy. The angel visitant and the Holy Ghost were all very well. But he must have suffered too—been crucified too after his own human fashion—that is, if he had loved Mary. But perhaps he hadn't. Perhaps he had been bored and ashamed of the whole business.

(But Justine—Justine—— If ever Justine should bear a child——)

And there she was—sprung from nowhere—in uniform with her famous order and all, standing by the curb outside Peter Robinson's, ready to take her overcrowded bus by assault. He saw himself stride up to her so quickly and ruthlessly that he nearly upset an old lady who only smiled at him. And he took her with a cruel strength by the arm and marched her off down a side street. They went on walking—he didn't know where. He couldn't remember what they said to each other or whether they said anything at all. They were incoherent—terribly near tears. Gale didn't dare look at her. For it wasn't only the moment he had to deal with. Driving him, harassing him were the years of accumulated impulse and restraint. In this respect he took it for granted, since he was a man, that he had suffered most. As each day's avalanche had swept away his friends and certainties and brought him that much nearer to his own casual extinction it had become more difficult to keep himself inviolate for her. Life, outside the welter of the trenches, presented itself more and more definitely in the shape of a prostitute bearing at least some sort of respite and forgetfulness in her raddled hands. It would have been forgivable if he had snatched at what little she had to offer him. Actually, for all his tormented manhood, he had not been able to do so. He had felt instinctively that there were values too delicate, too precious to be risked. He had gambled his virtue on a hundred-to-one chance. And his first coherent words to Justine were to tell her so.

"I've waited for you—there's never been anyone else—not for a minute."

"And I've waited for you."

It was funny how little her answer had meant to him at the time. He had hardly noticed it. He bundled her into a taxi and drove her to the nearest registry, and twenty minutes later she was his wife, with a crossing sweeper and a chance soldier to bear witness to the event. He hadn't even asked her to marry him. He was madly, completely happy. For the War had at least taught him to treat an hour of life as an entity—and sometimes as an eternity—and they had still five unbroken hours together.

He took her to lunch at his hotel. They sat there with a little white table between them. Gale remembered catching a glimpse of himself in the glass behind her and of being checked for a moment by a sort of grievous astonishment at his own wan and haggard youth. And she had changed, too. He could see it now. She had grown thinner. The look of baffled perplexity had given place to a look of no less baffled knowledge. But the quality of her was the same. The eyes were the same—fiery brown with their challenging courage.

They smiled unsteadily at each other. He did not know what to say to her. He wanted to be gentle and unselfish. He tried not to desire her so desperately. It was all wrong. They loved each other—he knew they weren't either of them under any illusion. They even knew and understood each other in some profound, instinctive way of their own. But they weren't intimate. They needed days of quiet normal companionship. They were being crowded brutally to their hour. They couldn't help themselves. They had so little time—so pitiably little time.

She told him about the unknown Serbian officer.

"I wish I could meet him one day," Gale said, "and tell him what I think of him."

"I've kept the old cloak."

"You'll have to show it me."

Their eyes dropped. He heard her draw her breath quickly but furtively, like someone in great pain who doesn't want to make a nuisance of herself.

"I'm glad I'm going back to-morrow," she said, "and that it's to France. I couldn't bear it otherwise."

He leaned across to her. He covered her hand with his and pressed it hard. But he couldn't have spoken to save his life. His eyes fell on his wrist watch. Two o'clock. Only three hours now. He felt her hand turn under his, holding him, forcing him to look up at her.

"I know," she said. "It can't go on like this. We can't leave each other like this. It may be all we'll ever have. I'll go wherever you want. We belong to each other. At least—I know I want terribly to belong to you."

It was as Jane had said—she was awfully brave. Or perhaps it was the hours treading on their heels that stripped them both of reticence. Of the two she was the clearer in her vision—more fearlessly in touch with reality.

For when the door of his room closed on them both and they clung to each other it was he who faltered. He had seen her pallor and her closed eyes and felt her tears on his mouth. And he began to stammer some wild thing—about leaving her in peace—about being a brute and a cad, snatching at her and happiness. Her eyes opened. They met his straightly. He remembered the very quality of her voice—its unexpected harshness.

"Do you think I'm really made of such different stuff?"

So she tore down scornfully the last artifice. She released them both. From that moment their passion mounted together like two equal points of fire, blazing splendidly, with a tragic briefness, into one.

Gale rolled over with his face hidden in his arms. He was beginning to hate that shining immaculate figure poised above him among her gilded stucco clouds. For what did men and women

bring their prayers to a virgin? What could a virgin know of them?

The night was interminable. Overhead the bells dropped three notes into the emptiness.

Not even dawn——

They sat together very quietly, he in the stereotyped hotel armchair, she at his feet, leaning against him. They looked out of the grimy window across a dark sea of roofs and sullenly smoking chimneys that merged into the faintly irradiated gray of twilight.

Four o'clock.

At five the leave-train from Victoria.

One hour more. Not even that. Fifteen minutes at the outside. He would have to be at the station half an hour before time, and taxis were scarce. She would come with him, but they couldn't count that.

Fifteen minutes.

Never in his life, Gale thought, would he forget this room. Of all the despair and relief that it had witnessed in these strange years there was no trace. Unnumbered men had spent their last nights in England and often of life itself between these uneventful-looking walls—had dreamed their last uneasy dreams here. Men who had come to England for the first time to die for what she represented to them had sat where Gale sat, sick for their homes and people. The drab colours and characterless furniture seemed to have been chosen to absorb all traces of their passing. And yet Gale, in those last incredible minutes, was profoundly aware of them. Their grave shadows looked out as he did onto this beloved city now fading into a darkness which for them had not lifted again. And for them, too, this dingy little room might have been redeemed by one supreme act of union and farewell.

He bent and laid his cheek against her disordered hair. Their

hands were locked together. They were quiet like bewildered travellers who have been tossed up by a tempest into a moment's safety. It was difficult to think clearly—almost impossible to speak. His throat ached. He felt himself clinging tenaciously to the minutes and praying that he might be able to endure them decently. He could no longer have understood the separate conceptions of happiness and grief, for the two elements had become one in him. This morning he had been happy and unhappy in some old sense. But then this morning belonged to another life—to two already half-forgotten people.

He spoke quietly about trivial things.

"You see, dear, the War has knocked the family fortunes a good bit. There isn't as much as I could have wished. But of course it's all yours. My cousin Edward Braddyl—you'll find his name in the telephone book—quite a decent chap—will look after everything. And I'll make a will on the way over and get the Padre to send it home to you."

"Oh, Gale—please—please—what does all that matter?"

"It matters a lot to me. I'm your husband. I've got to look after you."

Their laughter trembled together and broke down. Through the sound of his own voice he heard the ticking of the gilt clock on the mantelshelf. The dim hand stood at the quarter and she got up. It was to him an act of charity that nothing since had obliterated. She helped him into his British Warm. His equipment waited for him at the station.

"My batman got leave with me. He's looking after things. An awfully decent fellow."

They were trembling. She was like a young nervous thoroughbred. He went heavily, spurs jangling, to the door and held it open for her. The shadowy bed was already sinking back into a chill anonymity. He kept his eyes averted. And as though she knew what was happening to him she caught him by the arm

and pulled him back to her and for the last time they clung together in unuttered tenderness.

The big, gaunt station, yellow with smoke-laden mist. The shrouded lights, swimming like luminous fish in dirty water and throwing strange shadows. Knots of drab-coloured men crowded against the gates waiting for them to open so that they might pass on to the dark infested sea and the torn world beyond. Passers-by, too accustomed, never accustomed enough, throwing these travellers shy, guilty glances. Women, staring about them restlessly, as though they were looking for something terrific to happen to deliver them, their pinched faces bearing a common stamp of fortitude and grief.

For three and a half years the scene had repeated itself. Only the actors varied.

A sturdy, thick-set soldier saluting cheerfully.

"All ready, sir."

"My wife, Prout."

"Glad to meet you, ma'am."

Prout took wives, as he took bombs, in his stride.

Gale saw her give the man her hand and hold his tight for a moment as though she were asking him to perform some miracle for her. He looked reassuringly at her.

"All O.K., ma'am. It's just their last kick."

They smiled at one another. It was all nonsense. But for the moment Gale felt that all three of them were strong and safe. They were decent, kindly people. They would see each other through somehow.

A Red Cross train sliding carefully to a distant platform. Red Cross men with their ambulances, manœuvring for position. Gale saw them out of the corner of his eye. He knew there wasn't much she hadn't seen, but he didn't want her to see that sort of thing now. He was glad when the bell clanged. The gates swung open. He heard her gasp and took her sharply by the elbow.

"Don't come, dear—better not—oh, just to the gate, then."

"I'm all right." She wasn't crying. She walked by his side. Her hand just touched his arm. God, how did people go through this, year after year? How did they bear it? What demoniac power forced them to consent to it? They stood together on the verge. She said urgently, brokenly:

"Don't forget——"

"Never, never—so long as I live——"

"Whatever happens——"

What irony! For all the sham experience of the War what had they known of life or of themselves? If they had known, wouldn't they have laughed in each other's faces!

2

Pepe slept like a lizard in the morning sun, one wary brown eye half open on a world which he didn't trust. So that when the padded door of the church was pushed open he was already wide awake. He sat up and the starving bitch went scudding down the archway steps with her tail between her legs.

The stranger came out into the sunlight. Pepe, who for some reason unknown even to himself didn't play much with the other children, had got into the habit of observing people. And this foreign fellow was something altogether new to him—very large and powerful and dangerous looking—with a vagabond's stubble on his aggressive chin, and yet not in the least a vagabond. In fact, though he was dressed casually and not in accordance with Pepe's idea of wealth he had an undoubted air of authority which Pepe appreciated. Pepe, unlike the rest of his world, despised beggars. He didn't beg himself. He stole. Or he consented to accept graciously. He wouldn't have bothered about the stranger if he'd been a beggar. But he had known at once that here was something unusual—even if he hadn't realized quite how unusual. It had been too dark to see

clearly. He hadn't seen, for instance, the man's eyes—unfamiliarly light in colour—and for whose expression Pepe had no name. But it reminded him of Balthazar's bull down in the savannah which, when it had been sufficiently tormented by the local amateurs of the ring, would look at you in just that way. And if you were wise you ran for your life.

Pepe had no immediate desire to run. He felt drawn to this odd fellow. The thick, light hair and fair, sunburned skin were amusing novelties. Besides, in a sense, he was under Pepe's guardianship. It hadn't been due to any fault in Pepe's wisdom that he had spent the night with the Holy Virgin. Pepe had warned him that it wasn't safe. The Virgin wanted to make a saint of somebody. Not that this haggard, ironic face bore any trace of saintship.

Father Valeza came out behind him. Pepe liked Father Valeza, though most of the villagers distrusted him. He was known to spend his nights in the sacristy—not in prayer, indeed, but poring over illuminated manuscripts of which the church was known to possess a small valueless collection. Once he had allowed Pepe to sit with him while he worked, and Pepe, peering like a black imp over his shoulder, had been seized by the first fierce emotion of his life. The vivid blues and reds and golds intoxicated him. He wanted them. He wanted to illuminate something himself. There was, in fact, an unfrequented spot on the citadel wall which was already ornamented with Pepe's conception of a bullfight, done in whitewash stolen from Pedro Castello while he was cleaning up his pigsty. But he remained hungry and dissatisfied. He wanted colour. Also he wanted to learn to read. But Father Valeza had discouraged him flatly. He said there was no surer way of going to the devil.

Probably Father Valeza knew what he was talking about. The villagers murmured that he had already gone to the devil himself. There was something in the way that he held Mass which they didn't like. And when he came to administer the

Last Sacrament he was more pitying than a priest ushering a soul into paradise or even purgatory had any reason to be. And he had a strange look. The thin features were not quite straight. The eyes had an expression of unquiet melancholy, like those of a man who has made an unholy compact.

The two men came together to the ramparts overlooking the road. In the strong, clear sunlight they bore a temporary likeness to one another such as is common among men who have been through a similar experience. They were both haggard and unshaven with lines of nervous weariness about the mouth and eyes. Pepe prepared for flight. The stranger glanced at him and smiled grimly.

"My guide," he said in his queer Spanish, "still waiting for his reward."

He put his hand to his pocket. Father Valeza, whom Pepe disliked vividly for the moment, restrained him.

"Better not, señor. The child has never had any money. There is very little in the village. You would only start trouble."

The stranger's hand dropped. He didn't seem to care either way. They stood together talking and Pepe perched himself on the wall, at a discreet distance, with his thin arms about his knees and his eyes alert as a sparrow who has heard the rumour of crumbs.

"Yes, indeed, señor. I remember you now. It was about ten years ago—when I first came here. We met at Don Cristóbal's. You were a friend of his. If I had known you were here I could have at least given you shelter for the night."

"It didn't matter, Father. I have been a soldier."

"Even to soldiers the church stones are inhospitable."

The stranger smiled again.

"Not more so than your parishioners."

"Well—you must not judge them. The unknown is always frightening to the peasant mind. Indeed, you ran a certain risk, coming here after nightfall."

"I am a pilgrim. Surely a pilgrim is sacrosanct."

"A pilgrim, señor? I did not even know that you were a Catholic?"

"I am not."

"Or indeed a believer in anything."

"Less than ever."

Pepe had the impression that these two were indulging in a disguised and bitter jest at the expense of solemn things. It tickled him. He didn't believe much himself. And what he did believe in—the Virgin's capacity to make a saint of him, for instance—he didn't like.

"You see, Father"—the stranger handed his companion a roll of cigarette paper which the latter accepted with a slight bow—"ten years ago it occurred to me that if ever I wanted to retire from life this was the place I would come to. It has, as it were, a monastic quality without faith or restrictions. Of course it was a mere fancy. It didn't occur to me that such a thing might really happen to me. But in this I was merely lacking in imagination."

Father Valeza rolled his cigarette with soiled, expert fingers.

"The War——?" he said tentatively.

"Why not? We make the War responsible for everything."

"You were badly hurt, señor?"

"Vitally. My health, however, as you see, is quite unimpaired."

"One might call you lucky."

"I am not sorry for myself. I am merely indulging in a well-earned right to get out of a world for which I am no longer fitted."

"It is difficult to believe, señor."

"Be kind enough to take my word for it. The wound was, if you like, merely God's method of revealing Himself to me. I am in the process of adjusting myself."

"I often doubt whether it can be done," Father Valeza observed. "We adjust ourselves eventually to a coffin, but we have to die first."

"I see you philosophize, Father."

"I have made my own experiences. However, that is neither here nor there. Since you wish to stay with us——"

"—for the rest of my life."

Father Valeza smiled doubtfully.

"—at least you must have somewhere to live. I won't tell the people you are a pilgrim. They wouldn't believe you, and if they did you would only find yourself in difficulties. I might say that you had come here as an expert to help me with my manuscripts. They won't like you for it. But they will accept you."

"I remember now. You had an idea the Church possessed some particular treasure. Don Cristóbal told me you had taken the cure here on purpose."

Father Valeza made a faint, distressed gesture.

"Mere talk. There is nothing here of value. But Don Cristóbal has never forgiven me. He suspects me as a disloyal servant. It is true I have always cared for these things. Too much indeed. It is better to be born without the capacity to care. Well, I have some interesting stuff there—more than I knew myself. I will show you one day"—he smiled gravely—"when you have time."

"And my monastic cell, Father?"

"Don Cristóbal still lives in his old house. It is a rambling place and falling to pieces. But they might make up a room for you. It would be a kindness, señor, for he is very poor. Indeed, he lives on the charity of those poorer than himself. Thank God he does not know it and never will."

"He gave me a strange reception last night."

"Yes, I can believe it. At night his madness becomes active. He believes himself then to be Don Fernando, who defended this place against the Moors. He has eaten out his heart—a Don Quixote, señor, without even an old nag or a lance or a cause. A very gallant gentleman who has lost himself in a strange world."

"He and I should do well together," the stranger observed.

"But, as it happens, I don't want companionship—not even a madman's. I want to be left alone."

"You think so. It may be that it is not so simple. But at least the old man will not trouble you. In the daytime he is quiet and courteous, poring over his records. I tell you, it would be a kindness, señor. María will look after you. She has a rough tongue, for life has dealt roughly with her. But if you are a friend of Don Cristóbal's she will take you to her heart."

"God forbid. So long as she gives me breakfast——"

The two men were going. Pepe slipped from his perch. The soft scuffle of his body down the side of the wall made the stranger turn to look at him.

"And your breakfast, Chiko?"

Pepe could only stare in good-humoured bewilderment, and the priest laughed.

"We don't know what that means, eh, Pepe? Here one eats when there is anything to eat."

"Aren't you hungry?"

"Always, señor."

"Well, then——"

He unfastened his knapsack and produced a paper parcel. Pepe watched avidly. Bread and cheese. More than he had ever had in his life at one time. The gaunt-ribbed bitch crept up the steps again, staring with wild eyes. Pepe spat at her.

"You would bite the food out of Christian's mouth, infidel," he declared shrilly. "Begone, or I will throw more stones at you."

But this time the animal did not move. It had become possessed of an anguish greater than terror. The stranger took the bread and broke it. One half he laid on the wall. He did not seem to be aware of the dog at all. He threw the remaining half a few feet from the wretched creature's working nostrils and it was gone like a flash of shadow.

The priest shook his head gravely.

"Don't let the villagers see you do that, señor. Bread is sacred. There are too many hungry people."

"I shall do as I damn well please, Father."

The two men went down the steps through the archway. Pepe stared after them. He almost forgot to be indignant. Who was this man who spoke so roughly and threw bread to a dog? He must be mad. Madder than Don Cristóbal whose madness one could understand. It was disgraceful to throw bread about like that. And when Father Valeza reproved him he had sworn as Pedro Castello swore when he was drunk. Only he wasn't like Pedro Castello. He was like one of Father Valeza's coloured figures.

Pepe gathered up his windfall and sauntered down the steps, munching as he went. He was too absorbed in his reflections and the excellent savour of the cheese to notice his enemy. The old bitch slipped out of her hiding place. She was no longer alone. She had found a companion as gaunt and pitiful as herself. The two slunk cautiously in the rear of the procession.

3

Four men sat together in the corner of Jaime Balthazar's *fonda* and played with a single pack of cards. The cards were bethumbed and grimy so that they were scarcely decipherable. But the *fonda*, which consisted of one low-ceilinged room with two bare tables and a shelf of ambiguous-looking bottles, was scoured spotless. The tables and floor shone like the surface of still, dark water.

Jaime Balthazar himself had taken a hand. It was four o'clock. The whole village lay under the spell of the siesta. Nobody would be wanting his heavy red wine until the sun went down behind the mountain and the air became sharp again. For the present, four glasses of black coffee served to keep the players wakeful.

Balthazar dealt out the cards.

"I tell you, El Grande is a bigger and fiercer bull than anything in the Duke of Alba's herd," he said. "He is the very spit of Principio, who killed Paolo Gordoni at the Corpus Christi *corrida* in 1900. Only he is swifter and more intelligent. Things will happen when that fellow comes out of the *toril*. They offered me five hundred pesetas for him. They had forgotten that Jaime Balthazar had been something of a *espada* in his day and knows a bull when he sees one. I laughed in their faces. 'Two years more and he goes to Madrid for no less than two thousand pesetas, señores,' I said——"

They began to play. The shutter of the one narrow window stood half open, letting in a cool shaft of light in which the sun motes danced lazily. It lighted up with the transparent whiteness of a Vermeer painting the faces of the four players: Luis, the old rope maker; Goana, the shepherd, lean and hard-featured, his nondescript clothes tied around him by an assortment of strings and strips of ancient rag; the arrogant young Vicente; and Balthazar himself with his thick, mobile mouth and small eyes bright with sardonic merriment and potential violence. All four faces were like masks carved out of some dark wood that the sun and wind had weathered to a superficial resemblance to one another.

They played intently but without emotion. The cards dropped to the table with the soft flutter of alighting birds.

"It doesn't matter," Balthazar went on. "As it happens, I can afford to wait. Since the Englishman has come to this place I have sold more wine than I have done in a year. He is a fine drinker, that Englishman."

"He has money enough."

"Not so much as he had. Ten years ago he came here in a great roaring car. I remember him well, for those of us who had not been to Madrid, as I had, had never seen a car before. We stood round him forty deep. Some of the older people were

inclined to be ugly. But he laughed and joked with them in his funny Spanish. He was a laughing young man——"

"He does not laugh any more."

"He drinks instead. Last night he sat here drinking until the sun rose and I had to turn him out. He went without a word—as steady as I was, for all that he had two litres of my heaviest vintage in his legs."

"He wears clothes like a poor man."

"Make no mistake, friend. If he dresses poorly it is because he no longer cares. He has money enough to throw it away. He even buys food to throw to the dogs."

"That is an evil, unchristian thing to do," Goana said viciously. "It is an insult to God Himself. Father Valeza should reprove him."

"Bah! Father Valeza!"

"They are of a kind, these two. What do you expect of a man who has sold his soul for a heap of mouldering books? And this Englishman is a heretic——"

Luis interrupted gently.

"Don Cristóbal would not harbour a heretic in his house unless he were a good man. There may be good heretics on whom God will have mercy. I have spoken to María. The English Señor was a soldier in the War of which we have heard. He has suffered. We should have charity."

Balthazar nodded.

"Charity is a virtue, and to be a soldier is virtuous. One must be brave—as brave as an *espada* in my day."

"Nevertheless, one should not throw food to dogs."

"That is a sin."

Young Vicente spoke contemptuously.

"And who knows that he was brave? Soldiers have run away before now."

"That is true indeed. Perhaps it is disgrace that has driven him here."

"Why should he come among us? We do not want him. He is an intruder. I tell you that he will bring misfortune."

"I am not afraid of that sort of misfortune," Balthazar said, jingling money in his pocket and winking, "and I have never refused charity to those whom God in His mercy has chosen to afflict. If the foreign Señor needs my wine to console him, he shall have it, and if he pays for it—so much the better. Perhaps Goana here has his own reasons, however——"

"He did not seem a coward," the rope maker intervened with his thin old voice. "It was I who brought the news that War had broken out. I had been down to Tuella with my rope, and it was the *alcalde* himself who told me. On my way back I saw the Englishman and the young English girl standing outside Goana's hut."

Goana flashed an uneasy glance at the door.

"Someone is coming. If it is the Englishman, I do not choose to see him. It is my belief that he is mad. He was mad then."

"Well—you took money from him, which one should not do from a madman. He gave you a good price, didn't he?"

"Good enough."

"And hasn't he paid you since, year in, year out, to look after his flock? You know best, Goana, where that flock has gone to."

"One doesn't obey madmen," Goana declared sullenly.

Balthazar rolled a cigarette, wetted the paper with the tip of his big tongue, and sat back, tilting his chair.

"Well, all right. It is not my affair. No doubt you will explain all that to him yourself. I should like to hear you."

"If I had my way," said young Vicente, throwing down his cards, "he should be stoned out of the village."

"It may come to that," said Goana eagerly. "It is not well for us to have a heretic among us. If Father Valeza were a true Christian, he would take steps himself. But the Virgin is stronger than Father Valeza. The Virgin will not suffer heretics to defile——"

The door opened and they turned hastily. A woman stood

against the bright square of sunlight. Goana blinked and crossed his fingers under the table. She was an unholy figure. Her black hair hung in untidy loops about her ears. The soiled bodice of her dress had been torn open at the neck and showed the fine lines of ingrained dirt. She was still young. But the lids of her eyes were ravaged by disease, her cheeks sunken, and the mouth was contorted by pain and irony. So that she seemed old and corrupted. At Balthazar's not ill-natured gesture she shrank back, showing her yellowed teeth like a threatened cur.

"*Vamos,* unfortunate one. There is no place for you here."

"I do not seek it," she retorted. "It is not for myself I come, but for the English señor."

"Aha"—Goana threw his companions a malicious glance—"you see what company he keeps—dogs and outcasts——"

She covered him with a dark bitterness.

"He is a stranger. He does not know who I am. He gave me money to find you, Juan."

"Since when have I been Juan to you?" Goana demanded indignantly.

"Not for those many nights," she flung back. "But I have told you that the English Señor is looking for you. He has gone down to the sheep hut. He is looking, no doubt, for the sheep that you stole from him."

Goana stood up violently and she stepped back and slammed the door in his face. They heard her harsh, ironic laughter follow her across the Plaza. Jaime Balthazar gathered up the scattered cards.

"Better to go and meet him frankly, Goana," he said. "This is not Madrid. In a place like this one cannot escape one's worst enemy forever."

Goana hesitated. Then he slipped back into his seat.

"I have a good conscience," he said. "If he wants me, he can find me here."

"And if he makes trouble I will make trouble too," Vicente added threateningly. "I at least am not afraid of him."

Balthazar dealt out the cards.

"Let us have patience and Christian charity, señores."

4

As he went down the dusty, broken road to the plain, Gale heard the bells ring behind him. They were not just tolling the hour. They rang insistently, with a grave happiness. It was Corpus Christi. Gale felt for a moment dizzy and confused like a man who has come back to consciousness out of a long bout of fever in a strange place. The arbitrary divisions of time had been wiped out for him. Nevertheless, life had gone on somehow. He had left England on Justine's birthday. That must be two months ago.

Long since—perhaps on that same night—she must have done what she had said she would do. Perhaps she had known for a long time that she would do it—that it had become inevitable. They had torn each other to pieces for so long and so terribly. And there was Nat in the background—powerful, patient, waiting till flesh and blood could stand no more of it. There had been moments when it had been difficult for Gale to hold his hand from a disastrous act, so clearly had he been aware of Nat's cool and calculated patience. Nat had bided his time. He had brought her home that night. What had passed between them Gale didn't know. But he had recognized beneath her utter exhaustion a recklessness that was more than courage. They had fought each other without quarter. And in the end she had told him—— Nat was sailing to rejoin his regiment in India that night. But she had only to cable. He would send in his papers at once and they would go away together. Neither career nor reputation mattered any more to either of them.

Gale had only to remember the silver-gray room of the little house in Half Moon Street to feel again the full thrust of his hatred of her. He hated Nat too—but with a weakening ele-

ment of contempt and indifference to the man himself. There was something terrible in his hatred of Justine. At the time he had wanted to kill her. The whole complicated, overinvolved business of living had suddenly become quite simple. He had shared with any street bully whose woman had been unfaithful to him the need to tear the clothes from her body and stamp out of her face that look of blind passion that was not for him. He hadn't, in fact, stopped far short of it.

"Go to him then, you whore, and be damned to you."

He had caught sight of himself in a mirror and been checked and steadied by sheer astonishment. He could not have believed that his own face could contain so much tormented evil. It had made it somehow the more hideous that he should have been in evening dress—like a gibbering, ferocious monkey tricked out to look like an English gentleman. He had stood back, trembling and breathless, and they had stared at each other with horror and a sort of pity at what they had both become.

"I'm sorry—I'm sorry, Justine. I'm out of my mind. I'll get out of here. I'll give you your freedom."

"I don't want you to. I've at least got the decency to pay my own bills."

He hadn't meant it to end like that. No, indeed, he hadn't. He had left his office early in the afternoon expressly to tell her he was sorry and to beg her to have patience with him. He had walked home by way of the Haymarket and there he had seen in a shop window an antique ring such as he knew would please her. The time was past when he could afford to gratify any extravagant fancy, but there were things which he could still do and which of late he had left undone. And to-day was her birthday. It was a shame. The scene at breakfast had been all wrong—utterly his fault. He had been overwrought by this money-making which he detested and by the sheer, physical pressure which, however he might force it from his immediate consciousness, was always secretly at work in him. It sapped his

will power. It was undermining the whole of his nervous strength.

He had had a wretched night, too. He couldn't tell her that. One was too proud to whine. One expected that people who loved one to know instinctively when one was down and out. When they didn't it was childish to get stubborn about it. But there it was. She hadn't known that he had paced his room for hours, seeking a way of peace for them both. She hadn't known that he had wanted to go to her—to throw himself on that quality of mutual compassion which for moments at least had lifted them to a fine, serene vision of their life together—or that he had wanted to feel again, as he had felt them once, her tears on his face, her arms clasping his torn and broken manhood in the embrace of a profound humanity. She hadn't known. But she would have known once. What had become of her? What had become of them both? It was impossible that they should have sunk forever to the level of predatory, ruthless animals. There must be some way by which they could regain themselves and that heroic, generous past.

He had actually gone out into the passage and across to the door of her room. He had meant to kneel beside her bed and rest his head against her breast and tell her how difficult it was for him to live. Some miracle of understanding was to have taken place between them. But he had seen that there was no light under her door and in a moment the impulse had died and rotted in him. She was asleep—he could imagine how calmly, how indifferently. She did not know, because she no longer cared, that he was in hell. Her thoughts, her dreams, her passionate desire was elsewhere. If he had gone in she would have turned dazed, distrustful eyes on him as though she were asking, "By what right does he dare——?"

He had gone back to his room and had lain all that night under the lash of an imagination that with every hour grew more subtle, more scorching. By the morning he had reached

a point of calculating anger and bitterness that in its turn sought to hurt and hurt badly.

Their last meal together. Its grotesque commonplaceness.

They sat calmly opposite each other—two rather fine and cultured specimens of their class.

"Kadgerce or bacon, Gale?"

"Neither, thanks."

"Not hungry?"

"Not very."

The soft closing of the door behind the maid's back. Gale felt their naked, nervous awareness of each other. They were on the edge of a precipice, and half they wanted to hold back from the final disaster and half they were mad to throw themselves over and make an end. Life seemed to be hanging on their first movement.

"You look tired, Gale. Didn't you sleep well?"

He glanced at her. He hated the perfunctory courtesy of her question. The shadows under her eyes did not move him. They made her in some softening and gentle way more beautiful. And her beauty was no longer his. It had become a torment. Everything about her that he had loved—her fine hands, her immaculateness, the charming, rich simplicity of her taste—exasperated him. He laid down his paper and got up. He was trembling and he knew that she saw that he was trembling. He made his voice the more ugly and indifferent.

"We've travelled a long way, Justine," he said, "and we've both of us, one way and another, sunk pretty low on the journey. Morally we're all to bits. But please let us be honest. Don't let us pretend, even in trivialities, that we care a damn what happens to each other. For you, at least, to pretend, is a sort of minor insult that you might spare me."

Ridiculous. Pompous and ridiculous. She ought to have laughed in his face. But they were both past laughter. She went very white, and her mouth settled into composed lines.

"Very well. I do—quite understand. And I apologize."

So much for the morning. But by the afternoon he felt different. His work, however much he hated it, had forced his mind out of the night's obsession and he came back to his personal life, gentle and reasonable. The walk did him good. He needed exercise and it was difficult to get, now that he was working to make good his diminished income. And then the very purchase of the ring softened him. The tide of memory began to flow over his bitterness. It was her birthday. That made a landmark by which his thoughts could find their way home to her. There were so many lovely and sweet things to remember. Even in the trenches he had celebrated her birthday. Once, just before zero, he had taken a tot of rum from the soldier next him, and touched it with his lips, toasting her secretly. "One day, sweetheart, we'll make a real day of it." The soldier, no doubt, had thought he was either mad or in a blue funk.

And when the first birthday together had really come, he had kept his promise. Somehow, in spite of everything, their love had dressed itself with a new freshness. Some freak of fancy took them down to a little Cornish village where Gale had once spent his schoolboy holidays. They found a cottage set within a hundred yards of the cliffs where they were most wild and the winds so strong that unwary sheep would be swept over into the gaping blowholes full of foam and spume and thundering tides. But on that day the winds were quiet. There was sunshine and a mild gentleness abroad such as comes sometimes to an English April, and Gale and Justine had awakened to a deep, delicious sense of happiness. They had become overnight a boy and girl whom tragedy had never touched. Passion and the tormenting memory of passion were cleared away like dark mists. They made sandwiches and went picnicking. They climbed precariously among the rocks, resting under the shelter of the gray Cornish walls already faintly flushed with thrift, and looked out over the calm and splendid sea. They watched the cormorants busy with their nests in

the dangerous face of the cliff. The seagulls visited them like old friends and took food almost from their hands. The skylarks hidden in the hazy blue above them had begun their first delicious singing. They did not think at all. They were scarcely conscious of themselves. They had become creatures of the earth and the sun and the wind. But when the dusk came and they wandered back to their cottage, hand in hand, they knew that they had been happy. And it wasn't over yet—this day of theirs. Gale built a fire while Justine gathered their supper together—sardines and eggs and ham and quarts of steaming coffee—a splendid schoolboy spread; and afterward they sat close together by the red blaze and Gale read loud from Swinburne's *Atalanta,* which suited their mood as though the sea had sung it for them. And then they were both sleepy and the fire had begun to burn low.

There were two neat little beds side by side in the low whitewashed room. It was cold now. The sea mist came in through the open window. They were very tired.

"Good-night, Justine."

"Good-night, my darling. Thank you for a happy day."

He thought, "It isn't over yet."

He lay awake and waited, looking up at the ceiling shining like a low white cloud above him. He knew what it meant to be cleansed of all sin. And presently he heard her move and the soft fall of her quick feet. He pushed back the clothes. He held out his arms to her and in a minute they were pressed close together, protecting each other with a deep overflowing tenderness.

"Cold, Gale, so cold."

"I'm glad it's cold. I'll keep you safe and warm, my sweetheart."

"It's awfully little—I'll crowd you out."

"Not if you keep very close."

"All night long?"

"Couldn't you bear it?"

"I couldn't bear to go."
"I wouldn't let you go."
"It's been perfect, hasn't it?"
"I've never been happy like that."
"Never."
"Is that true?"
"So true."
They lay there, their whispers melting into the deeper murmur of the sea, growing fainter as sleep closed its dark, smooth wings over them.
"I love you."
"I love you, Gale."
"It's all right, isn't it?"
"Always—always."

They had never gone back. Perhaps people never did. But there had been four other birthdays. And on each the light had grown dimmer. The garments of celebration bore dusty traces of the intervening journey. They might be regarnished, but there were stains and tears that with the utmost tenderness could not be disguised.

All these things Gale remembered on his walk from the jeweller's to the little house. It wasn't only tenderness that he felt for her. He was màking a resolute effort to understand. He was forcing himself to look the whole thing in the face. After all, she was a human being, placed under an intolerable pressure. As a man under that pressure, he wouldn't have done as well. He might have gone to pieces. At any rate, he would have failed her and found excuse for the failure. And now if there was anything to be saved from the wreck he had to hold fast to this admission—he had to be big enough to bear with her the onslaught of the tidal wave that threatened her. Life had been brutal to them both. But to her no less than to himself.

This temper had been strong in him as he turned the key of his door. A maid met him in the hall on her way down from the drawing room. She looked at him with a closed face behind which, he suddenly suspected, was a secret half-contemptuous knowledge.

No. The mistress was out. She had gone out immediately after lunch. She hadn't mentioned dinner.

"Very well," Gale said.

It was then six o'clock. He went up to his dressing room. On the way he passed her bedroom door and opened it and went in. He found himself shaking from head to foot. He hadn't expected her to be out. It threw him and his whole eager purpose into confusion. He had to keep steady, and by the spurt of red anger through his resolutely tranquil mind he had been warned of a dangerous instability. He had to get close to her quickly—be reassured by the awareness of her immediate presence.

The room was ordered and exquisite, like all her possessions. The lights were on and the fire burned cheerfully in waiting for her. He found himself like a sick pilgrim at a miraculous shrine, touching the little things on her dressing table. He thought suddenly, "If she were dead, they would break my heart."

And afterward, while he waited for her, he clung to the thought of them as a drowning man might cling to the frail weeds and grasses of a shore from which an irresistible tide is sweeping him away.

He dressed very punctiliously that night. Every detail was exaggerated to an absorbing importance. Funny that a white evening tie could make a man forget everything else—especially if his hands were shaking. And funnier still to remember that he had once taken it cheerfully for granted—as though that sort of thing belonged naturally to Gale Braddyl's pleasant destiny—that he should be a fine, good-looking fellow. Funny and tragic, too. Not to be thought about. Now he found

himself studying, with painful anxiety, the reflection of his blunt-featured face and light gray eyes, set deeply under fair brows that looked back at him sullenly like those of a boy who wants to laugh and is on the point of tears. He wanted with a new and humble sense of his tragic failure and insufficiency to see himself as she would see him.

The maid tapped at his door.

"It's seven-thirty, sir. Are we to wait?"

"Of course. Get up a bottle of champagne, Elliot. Tell the cook to put dinner back half an hour. Your mistress will want to dress."

"Yes, sir."

It was imagination that made him hear irony in that respectful voice—those soft, retreating footsteps.

He went down to the drawing room. A clean, freshly built fire invoked warm shadows that moved in a noiseless dance along the gray-and-silver walls. It was a charming room whose faintly austere delicacy lay like a veil over its comfort and strong, clearly visualized design. Somehow, he thought, it was like Justine herself.

He stood by the mantelpiece and looked into the flames and held himself steady and patient. Her ring was in his pocket. The next minute her key would turn in the lock. She had been at some party which she hadn't told him about because they had been angry with one another. Or at Claridge's with her father and mother, who had come up to prepare their town house for the season. She had been helping them. And at nighttime the traffic became impossible.

A clock somewhere in the distance struck eight. He moved sharply. The sound had shattered a thin partition between one section of his mind and another. No, it wasn't true. Between seven and eight the traffic slackened. He was making excuses. He was childishly deceiving himself. He had tried to throw a pretty covering of lies over the truth. But the truth remained. And now it had been stripped naked. He knew where

she was. He had known all the time. She was with Nat. She was saying good-bye to him. Or perhaps she wasn't saying good-bye. Perhaps she had made up her mind at last.

Nothing had changed. His reversion to the past had been sheer sentimentality. The past led to the present, but there was no way back to it. It was like the steps of a ladder that had been cut from under you. It was mad and dangerous to look back where it had been. You had to take things as they were—and yourself as you were. Gale had been a decent, reasonable human being, and now he was a beggar in tatters, impelled by instincts which made him recoil in horror from himself, but which he could no longer pretend to master. He had tried to be just. Justice was a straw in the tide of passion. It was worse than that. It was a two-edged sword, which he had turned against himself. For if it were true that in her place he would have yielded, then she had yielded. If he recognized that the burden was too heavy for her—then inevitably she had broken under it. He had damned her out of his own best reasoning. And the consequences—logical enough—aroused in him not pity or forgiveness, but a primitive desire to obliterate all three of them; with one gesture to make an end of this sordid, disgusting business of life.

Difficult to believe that Gale Braddyl could feel, after all, no more nobly than a jealousy-maddened navvy.

Ten minutes. He heard a taxi turn a corner of the quiet street and the sound of its roughly running engine, the click of the opening door. He strode to the window and pushed back the curtains. He was losing hold. The ground was slipping under his feet. He was being carried out of his depth. But even then there had been the possibility of rescue. There was still somewhere in him, like a lost, terrified child, a pitiful memory of her that might have saved them both.

Under the lamplight Nat was saying good-bye to her. Gale didn't need to recognize him. He knew. They stood quite motionless—and perhaps silent—looking at one another. It

was as though they could never move again. Gale couldn't see their faces. He didn't need to. He let the curtain drop and went back to the fire. Probably he walked steadily enough. He felt as though he were lurching like a drunken man.

A long time afterward he heard the taxi start off and rumble into the distance—the soft opening and closing of the hall door, her feet on the stairs. She came very slowly, not as though she were afraid—Justine wouldn't be afraid—but as though she were tired to the point of death. The door opened and she stopped short on the threshold facing him. He himself faltered as though he had received some deadly internal hurt. In his half-crazed bitterness he had forgotten her dear familiarity. He had expected a stranger and an enemy. And after all it was Justine who stood there. And on the crest of this incoming wave of emotion he was swept toward her. Another moment and he might have hidden in himself that look of tragic bewilderment and weariness. But the moment was not granted them. It was an ironic comment on the triviality of fate that the mere fact that he stood at just that distance from her, checked him. He had time to observe her heavy eyes, her slack, exhausted mouth, her air of disruption as of having been battered and tossed by some actual physical conflict. He had time to remember how she had first given herself to him. What had then seemed a noble and generous passion took on a new sinister significance. Disgust and rage surged up in him like a wave of nausea.

"You have no decency—no decency," he stammered.

She closed the door.

"Don't, Gale. Please don't. Not now. I'm so tired."

"Yes, you must be tired. Let me see. From two till eight. Six hours. My God—yes, you must be awfully, awfully tired——"

"Gale, we were in the park. We talked and talked."

His thought struck venomously, like an adder.

"Did you tell him? Yes, of course you told him. You had the beastliness to tell him——"

Her hand went to her eyes. It was as though, too weary to defend herself, she had to shut out the vision of mean cruelty which he had thrust on her. And he remembered her innate chivalry, her defence of all hurt, tormented things. He remembered—with the swift inconsequence of a dream—the dying sheep and her fine courageous anger. But the memory was like a flash of lightning through a torrential darkness. It had illuminated them both. But it was gone.

"Gale—you know I didn't tell him—you know I wouldn't."

"How do I know? You lie and lie to me. You've been unfaithful to me." He was almost pleading with her, beating his hands together. "For God's sake, try to tell the truth. You have, haven't you? You've been unfaithful?"

"I've never lied to you, Gale. I haven't been unfaithful—not in that way."

"What's that matter? What's it matter what you do with your damned body? You've been unfaithful all the same."

"I don't know. I can't tell you. It's all confused. Please don't ask me now. I don't understand, either."

"You love him, don't you? You want to go to him——"

She put her hand to her head, brushing aside her hair as though she couldn't see quite clearly. She said painfully, very slowly:

"Yes—I think so. Yes—I want to go to him."

It was then he had borne down upon her. The memory of that scene was like a cancer eating at the very centre of his brain. He seemed monstrous and incredible to himself. But he had only to visualize for an instant Justine and Nat, standing there in the lamplight, facing each other in that spellbound immobility, to feel madness rising in him.

He had crossed to Calais that night—in evening dress, with the barest necessities tossed together in a suitcase. The ring

that he was to have given her he had flung overboard. With that gesture he had broken the last link between them—and between himself and life as he had known it.

He did not know how long that strange nightmare pilgrimage through France had taken him. He had tramped and lived like a beggar, not daring to accept a physical relief which would have set his mind free. He had accomplished immense distances. For the pursuit had been close behind him and it was not till he had crossed the Pass of Roncevaux into the land of blood-bespattered Christs and mules that he had drawn breath.

Gale looked back over his shoulder. For he had become conscious that he was being followed. A few paces behind him the dogs trailed noiselessly through the dust. At night they were like terrible earth-bound ghosts haunting an old desolation. But in the daytime they were just dogs—starved, devoured by sores and vermin, of all ages, of all shapes and sizes, pitiable grotesques tossed on the garbage by an unthinking life. But to Gale, dogs for all that.

The old terrier bitch, with the pale eyes out of which madness was slowly fading, led them. As she saw Gale turn she dropped on her haunches and waited. The rest wavered and fled.

And behind them Gale had recognized the boy Pepe. He too stood still. His puckered brown face wore a quaint expression of wide-eyed absorption as though he knew himself to be bewitched and was rather pleased and interested by the experience. But the presence of these two strange followers exasperated Gale. He had come to this place to be alone and to forget how to care or have pity. He picked up a big stone out of the dust.

"*Vamos*—the pair of you!"

He let the stone drop. They had not flinched. It was evident that they were no longer frightened. But they did not follow him any more. He could feel them standing there in the hot

sunlight, gazing wistfully after him with their perplexed and hungry eyes.

5

"I will tell you how it was," Goana declared, "then if this Englishman accuses me, Father Valeza shall judge between us."

He made an ironical gesture. And the priest who sat alone twisting his cigarette between his soiled, lean fingers looked up quickly. He seemed nervous and discomfited, as though he felt that his authority had been invoked in malice.

"What is it you have to tell us, señor?" he asked.

"Wait, Father, just wait a moment——"

Goana settled himself in the attitude of a professional story-teller, one hand lifted to command silence. He had a good audience. There had been dancing on the Plaza, but now the two elderly musicians had changed their flutes for glasses of Balthazar's wine. The dancers rested. The men sat together at the tables which had been carried out of the *fonda* into the cool of the evening and played cards and smoked and drank lazily. The women kept to themselves. They chattered by the edge of the ramparts or by the booths of cheap finery which travelling peddlers in honour of the day had set up against the fortress walls. Their little high heels clicked on the rough pavement. As they moved the flare over Balthazar's door made strong fantastic silhouettes of their long swaying skirts and erect bodies. The night vested them with a stately elegance. But they were only shadows to the permanent reality of the tall tower and ancient walls behind them. The distances of plain and mountain beyond the ramparts became faintly luminous. The moon was rising. By its reflected light beneath the horizon the Pyrenees marshalled ghostly marching cohorts. It was as though above the consciousness of these transitory inhabitants the village fortress and its old enemy maintained themselves stubbornly.

At Goana's angry voice the card playing and shrill chat-

tering broke off. The women came together about him with the soft, fluttering sound of birds after fallen grain. The men turned in their places and showed a calm, good-humoured amusement. But Goana was in grim earnest. He had been drinking and had taken a neighbouring jest as to the current value of sheep in bad part.

"I am an honest man. Judge between a good Christian and a heretic, señores."

"By all means let us have justice," said Balthazar, chuckling. He leaned against the jamb of his door, his arms folded, his big body outlined by the lighted room behind him. A little boy in a very large apron and carrying trays of glasses scudded ceaselessly in and out. "And let us have the truth as well," Balthazar added. "You have told us strange tales enough of your precious sheep."

"That's right. And tell us how you became rich, Goana."

Goana threw the last speaker a bitter glance.

"I am not rich. I am a poor man."

"Well, tell us how you became poor and lost your sheep then."

Balthazar waved down the gust of shrill laughter.

"You will make him angry. And then we shall have to ask the Englishman."

Goana sat forward with his glass tightly clasped between his lean, dark hands.

"I will tell you the truth," he added. "It happened ten years ago this summer. We all of us remember that summer. It was terrible. Rain and bitter winds all through a late spring. The old people died one after another. Every day there was a procession to the burial ground. And the crops failed and the animals were sick. All of you remember me in those days. I was a poor fellow—as I am now. I lived in the shepherd's hovel outside the gates and kept my few sheep. They were all I had. That year my sheep died like the old people—one of them every day, and by August only half of

my flock were left alive and among them two late-born lambs that would have fetched me nothing. God knows the best of them were wretched creatures enough. I would not have dared risk the road to Tuella with them. They would have died by the wayside. Well, then, Machquito from Tuella comes along and looks the beasts over. He says: 'It is true, Goana, that there is not much to them. But I will send over my cart for them to-morrow. Have them ready for me outside your house and I will give you a hundred pesetas for them and take my chance.' Well, it was a good offer and I accepted it thankfully. The next morning I gathered the flock together as I had promised. Father Valeza may remember that morning, for he had ordered a special intercession with the Virgin and the Blessed Figure was to be carried through the village. I took no part in it, for I was busy with my sheep. The morning broke fine enough. But toward noon clouds came up suddenly. They were as black as night and there was lightning over the mountains. The sheep were terrified. I could not keep them together and I called Philippe Pastor—who is dead now. God have mercy upon him, or he would bear me witness. Between us we threw the sheep, one by one, and tied their feet together and heaped them in front of my hut door as I had promised. It was hard work to get it done in time. The sheep fought as though devils had entered into them—as I believe they had—and the sweat ran down our backs like water. Then the storm broke. Even in my hut the rain came through in places and the lightning was so terrible that we were afraid and closed the door against it. Señores, I have never heard a storm like that. It was like the Day of Judgment. We could hear the sheep bleating and crying outside like damned souls, but we were not afraid for them, for we had tied them fast and we knew they couldn't escape. Presently we couldn't hear anything but the thunder. It was as though the mountains were falling about our ears. So that when someone knocked violently at our door and called to us

I was too terrified to move. But Pastor said, 'It is only a woman,' and went to the door and opened it."

Goana waited. He took a long drink of wine and seemed to fall into a fit of amused abstraction. He did not see a figure creep out of the mouth of the dark side street and come noiselessly within a few feet of him. But Balthazar and the priest saw her. Balthazar seemed on the point of speaking, then merely shrugged his shoulders. The shadow remained pressed motionless against the wall.

"Well—and what then?"

Goana slapped the table with his open hand so that the glasses chattered.

"True. It was a woman. But such a woman as please God I shall not see again. She was a godless, shameless creature. Her thin skirt was up to her knees. She wore a knapsack like a soldier and carried a great stick. She was soaked through, so that one saw every line of her body. But her red hair curled up like fiery snakes. Her eyes were red. There were sparks in them—I swear it—so that I crossed myself.

" 'Are these sheep yours?' she asked.

"I said, 'Yes.' And then she caught me by the arm and dragged me out into that deluge. Thunder and lightning seemed to mean nothing to her. I tried to fight her off, but she was strong as a man and mad with a wicked anger. She said: 'Have you no heart? Or are you worse than a beast?' I didn't know what she meant. The very sheep rolled their eyes at her. They couldn't make a sound. But they were shivering and shaking as with the palsy. I swear they knew she was a devil. 'You beasts! You beasts!' she said. The rain almost choked me. The road was like a river in flood. One of the sheep had rolled over into a puddle and was already drowned. So much the worse for Machquito. He should have kept his promise. And there was this witch shaking me by the arm and upbraiding me. But Pastor came to the door and laughed at her. He had a way with women—God have mercy

on him—and no fear of devils. 'Sheep are not Christians,' he said. 'They are given us by the good God to satisfy our hunger. And they are not your sheep, so they are no concern of yours.'

" 'As to that we shall see,' she said. And to my indignation she took a knife out of her pocket and began cutting the sheep loose. Pastor and I sprang upon her. I do not know what would have happened, for I swear that she had more than a human strength and for my part I was so befuddled with the tumult of the storm which now broke immediately overhead that I could hardly stand. But Pastor was mad with anger. I think if he had got the knife into his hand he would have killed her. But suddenly I heard a roar and a screech as of some great bird swooping down on us and there was the Englishman's car and the Englishman himself. He jumped out and flung Pastor headlong. And then he stood there, wiping the mud and rain out of his face and looking at the sheep. Then he looked at the girl and she at him. I don't know what they said to one another, for they spoke their own language. But it was only a few words. By this time Pastor was on his feet and raving like a madman, but they took no notice of him. The Englishman turned to me. 'How much do you want for those sheep?' he asked. I shrugged my shoulders. I told him they were already sold for one hundred pesetas. He shook his head. 'You are mistaken. You have sold them to me for two hundred.' Well, what could I do? He was a big fellow and angry as she was, though with a cold anger. Besides, two hundred pesetas is twice as much as one hundred, and Machquito had not kept his promise. So I said, *'Eso es.* The sheep are yours, señor.' Then he wanted to know the price of my land and my little house and I was so astonished I named the first sum that came into my head. And he said, 'I will give you twice as much. And now go to hell, both of you.' He spoke a strange Spanish, but I understood him. I was trembling from head to foot with the cold and the rain and fear of these two mad people. I said, 'Señor, this is the

only place I have to live in. Night is coming on and the storm is terrible. Where shall I go?' And he said, 'Very well. I will have pity on you, though you have no pity on others'—which is not true, señores, for I have never refused a beggar charity. 'You can stay the night here. But first get food for us and milk for these poor creatures. If you don't, I won't pay you, but I'll break your neck instead.'

"Well, señores, I obeyed him. I was under a spell. All through the rain and mud I toiled up to the village and when I got back I was so worn out that I was like a man in a dream. I could not believe my senses. Those two had built a fire out of the charcoal I had gathered against the winter, and they sat opposite each other before it, warming and drying themselves. And all around them were the sheep—like little children——"

Goana's audience laughed. And Balthazar shifted his position. He said over his shoulder, softly but clearly:

"Better not let them see you, Chiquita."

And the woman, throwing him a furtive glance, shrank back farther into the shadow.

Goana nodded.

"Yes, indeed, like little children—timid little children. And there was something strange about these two. They were not of our kind. They were tall and fair and silent. They were like brother and sister—of one flesh. When I came close to the fire the man wanted to drive me away. 'Shiver yourself a little,' he said, 'and see how you like it.' But the woman spoke to him, and after that they let me sit near them among the sheep. They had taken the two lambs apart from the rest, for their legs had been broken by the ropes and they could not stand. The man made splinters for them with some sticks and his handkerchief, which he tore into strips. And they gave the lambs the milk which I had brought, feeding them out of the hollow of their hands. This made me very angry. I would have spoken my mind. But then I remembered that

they were heretics and that evil might come of arguing with them. So I held my peace. Surely I was right, Father Valeza?"

The priest nodded. He met the hostile, suspicious glances fleetingly.

"Yes—yes—without doubt."

"Well, it rained all night long. But the thunder and lightning had passed over the mountains and everything was quiet about us. Just the rain on the roof and the rustle and breathing of the sheep. Those two scarcely spoke to one another. The woman held one of the lambs in her arms. It had fallen asleep like a sick baby. Every now and then she would look across to the man and they would smile at one another. I felt sure that they had known each other—perhaps had been lovers. And the sheep stood all around them, blinking into the fire, and nuzzling against us like fellow creatures. Señores, it was a strange business. God knows what happened to me that night. For though I was still angry and indignant, I felt sometimes as one does when the Host is lifted——"

"Now you are talking blasphemy," interrupted young Vicente from the next table. "Isn't that so, Father?"

Goana shrugged his shoulders.

"I know it. God will forgive me. Will he not, Father? for I am telling you how it was. The next morning came. The rain had stopped and it was a clear gray dawn. Luis came to the door—he will bear me witness—and told us that a war had broken out beyond our frontiers. The Englishman set his great car roaring and he and the girl got in together with the two sick lambs. The Englishman spoke to me. And now he was grave and courteous, as one señor should be, speaking to another. He said, 'I have paid you the money you asked, Goana. There is no record of what has passed between us. But you are an honest gentleman, and you know that the land and the house and the sheep are mine. I give you the land and house to use as your own until I come back. In return I ask you to be guardian to my sheep. They must not die or suffer

as other sheep do. For they are very special sheep. They are miraculous sheep. When I come back I shall want a good account of them.' "

"That was madman's talk," said young Vicente.

"That's what I thought—now that the morning had come. And Pastor, too—though Luis shook his head over it all. He said one must respect mad people, for often they spoke with the voice of God. We talked it over and when Machquito came along—as he did at last—we told him what had happened. And he said, 'There is a famine in the country. The people are starving for food. There is no pasture for your sheep.' So I said, 'That is all true. Take the sheep. But keep your money. For the Englishman has already paid for them.' So we tied the sheep up again and threw them into Machquito's cart and Machquito drove off with a good bargain. Now, señores, and you, Father"—he ducked his head with a sly humility—"I ask you if I did not act as a good Christian and an honest man?"

The priest stood up. His brows twitched nervously. He rubbed his hands over his cassock as though they had become moist and uncomfortable.

"By all means. Yes. Surely you did right."

"*Eso es.* If the Father says so——"

"The Father doesn't care. He is thinking of his books. He is afraid of making you angry. He knows that the sheep belonged to the Englishman and that Goana is a thief without conscience."

At the sound of the strident voice they turned toward the place where the woman Chiquita had stood hidden. Now there was no use in hiding. Whatever wild impulse had driven her she took the consequences. She stood out truculently, defying them with her ominous ruin. And for a moment she held them silent. For in a strange way it was as though the place itself—its lurid light and darkness, its corruption and secret, indomitable life had become embodied in her.

Then the men began to laugh among themselves. The women hissed at her.

"The shameless one! How dare she? She should be stoned."

"Yes," Goana shouted. "She should be stoned. She has the evil eye. She is putting a curse on us."

The crowd streamed down on her. They were exasperated and half frightened. And before the threat of their hot, angry impact her defiance broke. She turned to escape and in blind panic flung herself against the priest, who for a moment held her close to him as though he would have covered her with his own body. Then he let her go and turned away. The sweat gleamed on the haggard, unshaven face.

"Quite right, Father," Balthazar muttered. "They have no love for you either. Better keep out of it, my fine gentleman. Let Balthazar get the kicks, confound you. And a plague on all women." He began to hit about him good-humouredly. "Now then, señores, if there are any breakages you know who will have to pay for them."

Goana caught the innkeeper by the collar and swung him on one side.

"Keep away from her—the vile creature, the lying, insolent witch."

Balthazar shrugged his shoulders. It was evident that he had done what he reasonably could and that the affair no longer concerned him. They were pushing the woman, screaming and clawing, toward the ramparts. They might push her over. Or at the last minute they might change their minds. Certainly she looked like a witch with her scratched, bleeding face and streaming hair. But Balthazar didn't believe in witches. He had been to Madrid and had been a fêted *espada* in his day. And this woman-baiting seemed to him a stupid business. He was turning disgustedly to the door of his *fonda* when an expression of mingled relief and malice dawned on his coarse good-natured face. He swung about. He shouted

a warning. And at once, like truant children overtaken by authority, the crowd stopped dead, regarding each other with a wry consternation. The noise of their voices subsided like dust after a brief whirlwind.

A man was coming down the steps of the church. He was tall and thin and upright. The flame of Balthazar's torch gave him the attenuated length and restless flickering quality of an El Greco figure. The steel helmet and breastplate and the great two-handed sword were alive with light. He spoke clearly and sternly.

"What noise is this? What trouble have we here in our very midst? Answer me, Captain Balthazar."

The crowd opened shamefacedly, letting the woman slip out from among them and melt like a hunted shadow into the safe darkness of the Calle de la Virgen. The innkeeper after a sardonic glance at his patrons advanced with a stiff military salute.

"Excellency, it is a mere trifle. A quarrel over a street woman —such as may happen anywhere among soldiers. It is already settled. To-day is a feast day. We beg Your Excellency to overlook the fault."

Don Cristóbal came on slowly down the steps. He was followed by old María, who, with her hands folded under her apron, wore a sour expression of resignation.

"You quarrel among yourselves," he said, "with the enemy at your gates. If it were not for the Holy Virgin and my vigilance what would become of you?"

"We should be all dead men"—Balthazar admitted frankly —"and ravished women. Let Your Excellency forgive his unworthy but grateful soldiers."

"See that the chief offenders are rebuked, Captain Balthazar."

"I shall rebuke them with my own hands, Excellency."

The priest had drawn aside. With the mingled furtiveness and defiance of a man who feels himself at a bitter disadvantage, he was making for the church steps. But Don Cristóbal

stopped him. The two men regarded each other proudly and at first without salutation. Then Don Cristóbal half lifted his hand. He asked with grim reproach: "I trust that you pray hourly for our deliverance, Father?"

The priest bowed but did not answer.

Don Cristóbal moved on to the ramparts. An invisible procession of great nobles might have been following at his heels. In fact there was only Balthazar and the old woman. A silence hung over the scattered crowd of watchers. It was a compassionate calm silence as though what was happening were part of their daily life. But when at the end of the half circle of low broken wall Don Cristóbal came to a halt looking toward the lights of Tuella in the far distance, a faint change came over them, light as a rustle of an uneasy wind. It was as though his intentness aroused ghosts among them and below them in the pale, empty plain.

"The enemy's fires are very bright," Don Cristóbal said. "They are feasting. There will be no attack."

"That's fine news," Balthazar declared cheerfully. "That means a good night's rest for all of us—and especially for Your Excellency, who deserves it most."

"I thank you, Captain Balthazar." He laid his hand, sighing, on the wall. "We were sorely damaged in that last assault. We must repair these breaks before daybreak."

"It shall be seen to, Your Excellency."

"And the wounded men?"

"They are doing well. Not a serious case among them."

"I am glad of that. They fought bravely. I would have visited them—but I have pressing duties. Greet them from me, Captain Balthazar."

"I will do so, Excellency."

The priest climbed slowly and alone up the steps toward the church. He bore himself like a man who has been beaten and disgraced but who cannot give up the cause that he has set himself. Don Cristóbal frowned after him.

"When the tumult broke out I was interceding with the Virgin for us all," he said. "I asked her to forgive her neglectful servant and to deliver the innocent."

"With your strong arm and her blessing we shall be delivered," Balthazar declared sturdily.

Don Cristóbal paused a moment. He added with a faint wistfulness:

"And when the English Señor returns from his inspection send him to me, Captain. He is a shrewd and valiant soldier. It strengthens me to have him near me."

"I will surely give him the message, Excellency."

"Good-night, soldiers."

"Good-night—good-night, Your Excellency."

He went on up the dark street toward his house. His shoulders were bowed a little. The old woman had taken the sword from him and he had made no resistance. She carried it like an umbrella, leaning on it with a scornful weariness. The street swallowed them both.

A sigh went up. They shook themselves like people waking from a daydream. The two flutists piped the first uncertain notes of an old waltz. The men and women glided together. They began to move with a grave stateliness among the shadows. The risen moon added a pale silver to the molten gold of Balthazar's torchlight.

Balthazar caught the little boy by his apron strings.

"Take wine and bread to the woman Chiquita," he ordered, "for above all things one must have charity."

6

Pepe peered in at the door. It was growing late and he was very hungry. If the Englishman didn't mean to do anything about it, it would be better to go back to the village where on feast days there was a certainty of scraps. But Pepe preferred to wait and take a chance. The Englishman's scraps were bet-

ter. And Pepe believed in the Englishman—for all that he was so obviously mad.

As now, for instance. Goana's old hut hadn't been inhabited for years—not in Pepe's lifetime. The door hung on broken hinges. There was a hole in the roof through which the fading daylight seeped through onto a decaying dusty emptiness. Goana, grown suddenly rich, had left an old table and chair behind him, and there was a pile of charcoal ashes on the raised hearth. The Englishman sat at the table with his face buried in his arms. He sat there so motionless that it was evident he had fallen asleep.

Pepe sighed. He sat dead opposite the doorway in his favourite attitude, with his arms locked about his knees. Fortunately he knew how to wait. Ever since he could remember he had been waiting—for food, for warmth, for the cool of nightfall, for something to happen—for a miracle. Not the Virgin's sort of miracle. But something that people really wanted.

A few paces away the terrier bitch waited too. Pepe had thrown several stones at her, but each time she had come back. As a matter of fact she no longer seemed to take Pepe very seriously. She had food under her lean ribs and that made a difference. She lay there with her nose between her paws and her eyes on the door. Finally Pepe had become resigned. It was lonely waiting. And besides the Englishman seemed to have some sort of crazy idea about her. At any rate he didn't approve of throwing stones. What was more—he didn't throw them himself.

Gale came out into the dusk. He had actually fallen asleep. He had dreamed of Whiteladies and Baise and Baby Jane and Claire and Peterkins. Not about Justine at all. Whiteladies was as near as he dared come to her. And now he was eaten by homesickness. He didn't want anybody in particular, but just the

people and the things that had made the best of his life. He felt as though his roots were bleeding and crying out to him.

Why, if he could just have had a child of his own—the thought flashed into his mind from nowhere. He had never wanted such a thing before. Only Justine herself. But someone of his own flesh and blood who owed life to him. Then he could have stood it better. He wouldn't have felt so outcast—so humbled and alone. It was this not being a part of life any more that had made him hate Justine and behave like a cad and a madman.

He stumbled over something soft and warm. It was Pepe who had fallen asleep, too. Pepe whimpered and clung to his leg, and Gale lifted him up by the collar of his dubious little shirt.

"Why in God's name do you two follow me round?" he asked.

"I'm hungry," Pepe explained simply.

Gale laughed and let him drop.

"You don't know anything about hunger," he said. "There is a passage in the Apocrypha—about a eunuch and a virgin. You should read it."

"I can't read," Pepe objected.

"No. And a damn good thing too."

The sheep had lain where they stood. Nothing in the War afterward had seemed to Gale so utterly sorrowful as the sheep lying there helpless under the storm. The rain had beaten down upon them. They no longer struggled. They were passive and resigned, with blood on their delicate limbs where the ropes had cut through the flesh. There was a look on their simple, innocent faces more than humanly tragic. It was as Justine had said. If human beings tortured one another—that was their business. But animals were exiles and strangers. There were things that Justine said and did that wrung his heart—they were so close to his own spirit. He could see her now—standing over those shivering bodies, her eyes almost black with anger.

"What are we going to do? We must do something."

"Of course," he had answered.

It had been understood at once between them that one must do something. (It was then that they had fallen in love.) However hopeless it was to tackle the cruelty of the world one had to do whatever came one's way. Queer that they should have so tortured one another.

The terrier bitch crept closer to him. She had never quite let him touch her, but every day the distance between them lessened. Gale had an odd longing for the time to come when she would let him pull her ears as he had done to his own dogs.

"She's hungry too, Pepe," he said.

Pepe dug his hands into his ragged pockets. He did not seem to think the matter very important.

"That's why she follows you, señor. If you didn't feed her she would leave you in peace."

"So would you, friend Pepe."

"No, I wouldn't, señor. I should follow you because you are strange. You are like a coloured picture in one of Father Valeza's books."

"Well, I never thought of myself as a coloured picture."

"Not outside," Pepe admitted, "but inside."

"You can't see inside me."

Pepe reflected.

"You are not like the other people here. They are black and still with red flashes. But you are a bright, clear colour. They are cold and you are warm. When you come I am warm all over."

"Pepe, I have an awful feeling that one day you will write a book about people's insides."

"No," Pepe said, "but I should like to paint pictures like those in Father Valeza's books. Only better. If I could have all those colours"—he nodded toward the dying west—"I would splash the walls all over with them."

"God forbid. Tell me, would you rather have those colours, Pepe, or a piece of bread and cheese?"

Pepe wrestled darkly with himself.

"I would rather have the bread and cheese now," he said, "but afterward I would want the colours."

They walked on silently together. Every now and then Pepe broke into a little run to keep pace with Gale's larger stride. He took it oddly for granted that they should go along together. And the terrier bitch slunk in the dust behind them.

"If she's going to follow us all the rest of our lives, we'll have to give her a name," Gale said.

Pepe doubted the necessity.

"Dogs don't have names."

"Why not?"

"They're not Christians."

"You seem to set a great store on being a Christian. What *is* being a Christian?"

"Being baptized."

"Well—let's baptize our friend here. In the name of—well, let's just call her Leah. That's the name of a dog I had at home."

"Where's home, señor?"

"England."

"Are all the people there like you?"

"None of them—I hope."

"Still—I should like to go where you come from."

"Why, Pepe?"

The child did not answer. He seemed suddenly overwhelmed by a profound shyness. He looked back over his shoulder and called, "Leah—Leah!" Whereat the dog whipped round and scuffled back several paces in abject terror.

"You see," Pepe declared triumphantly, "she doesn't even know her name."

"She will, if you have patience. You didn't know your name either, once upon a time."

That was true, of course. But really, Pepe felt, there was no comparison. However, he was rather out of breath with the pace and there was something more than usually queer about the Señor to-night which made it seem inadvisable to argue. It was as though beneath his casual and light manner a storm were blowing up.

"Tell me, Pepe. A woman spoke to me this afternoon. Or rather I spoke to her. I asked her to find the shepherd Goana for me. She was a wild-looking creature. Not like the other women. She must have been rather good looking once, but her eyes were red and swollen—as though she were going blind."

"Chiquita," said Pepe with disgust. "Yes, there is a curse on her. She is a bad woman."

"What do you mean—a bad woman?"

"I don't know, señor. But anyone who becomes a friend of hers is stricken with a terrible illness——" He added, after a moment "—especially men. So I am very careful. I run away when I see her coming."

Gale burst into a roar of laughter.

"I hope you will always remember to be very, very careful, Pepe," he said.

They came out onto the Plaza. The full moon was up by now, and Gale and Pepe and Leah threw large grotesque shapes on the cool white cobbles. Balthazar came to meet them. He pursed his thick lips eloquently and made a warning gesture toward Goana, who half rose from his table and then sat down again.

Gale thrust his arm companionably through the innkeeper's.

"Food and drink for friend Pepe and me," he ordered, "and goodly scraps for the señora Leah."

"If you mean this cur," Balthazar began, "I don't feed dogs, señor."

"No, so I gathered. But I do. I buy the food and pay for it, and a man has a right to what he pays for, hasn't he, Señor Goana?"

He brought his hand down with a mighty thwack on the erstwhile shepherd's shoulder. Someone tittered maliciously. And Goana sat still, staring into his glass. "And, by the way, were my sheep tender and well-flavoured, señor? I should like to know—if I don't seem too curious."

"Your sheep died. Sheep don't live forever."

"Lucky for them. It was kind of you to put them out of their misery. This is a sad world and anyone who helps a fellow creature out of it is a good Christian. Fill up Señor Goana's glass, Balthazar. A good Christian's glass mustn't stay empty."

Wild talk, Pepe considered. But the bread and sausage and hot coffee justified doubtful associates. He swung his legs negligently from the chair which was too high for him and watched the dog Leah nuzzling the already empty dish, her skeleton body shivering as with the ague. As Pepe shifted his position she started violently and looked up at him and then resumed her passionate search for a last morsel. Pepe didn't know whether to be annoyed or pleased at her tacit acceptance of him.

"And my house"—the Señor was saying loudly—"I have just paid it a visit. You have kept it in such excellent repair for me, señor. Accept my grateful thanks for your stewardship. Fill up the glasses all round, Balthazar. Let us drink the health of Señor Goana, a most honest gentleman."

Pepe disapproved. He would have liked to warn the Señor—if he was capable of being warned—that that wasn't the way to talk to people. It made mock of them and he could feel their hostility rising darkly. They might despise Goana. But he was one of them. And the Señor was a stranger and a heretic. Pepe knew quite well that he ought not to feel toward him as he did—with this kind of anxious protectiveness as though in some strange way they belonged to each other.

The people were drinking heavily. Usually they were careful and temperate. But to-night the devil seemed to have got into them. It was as though just because they hated and dis-

trusted the Señor they could not refuse his wine. He fairly poured it down their throats and down his own. He sat on the edge of his table with his flushed, fair face lifted to the moonlight and sang songs whose very rhythm and character antagonized them. He seemed to their close, narrow reticence dishevelled and indecent. He looked madder than ever, Pepe thought, as though he were seeing things that no one else saw, but strange and fascinating so that Pepe couldn't turn his drowsy eyes away from him.

But Gale was singing himself back into the trenches, back into the London streets, back to Whiteladies. He was striding over the close-shorn downs. At Ranelagh they would be getting themselves and their ponies to concert pitch. He was, in fact, very drunk indeed.

Balthazar touched him on the shoulder.

"Señor, it would be wise to go now. We have all of us had enough. There will be sore heads to-morrow morning. And besides, Don Cristóbal has been asking for you."

Gale stared at him stupidly. Then he lurched to his feet and threw money on the table. He made the company a sweeping, unsteady bow.

"Good-night. Go with God, señores."

They looked at each other grimly and did not answer him.

He had shaken Pepe off this time. Pepe had fallen asleep over his third sausage. But Leah was there and with her the ghostly crew of her old companions. Something would have to be done about them. That was what Justine would have said. She wouldn't have rested. Those terrible eyes gleaming like small crazy lanterns in the dark would have driven her frantic.

At any rate, Leah wasn't suffering any more. If she followed him it was for some other reason than that of hunger. Perhaps since she'd been baptized she had become a better Christian even than Pepe. She might conceivably watch one little hour at least.

Gale stumbled over the dusty cobbles. The day's heat had been caught between the close white walls of the street and tasted already fetid and decayed. The door of the houses were like black mouths gaping for air. But there was nothing living. The something black and huddled in the shadow of Don Cristóbal's vestibule might have been a bundle of old rags, carelessly thrown aside. Gale stood and looked down at it, swaying idly on his heels. Then he said, "Chiquita!" in a low voice and the wretched heap leaped up to human shape and turned as if to escape from an unimaginable terror of pursuit. He caught her neatly by the arm and held her.

"It's all right," he said.

She made a violent effort to free herself. She seemed incapable of hearing his reassurance. And after a moment he was silent too, holding her patiently and ruthlessly until she had fought herself to a standstill. Then she lifted her face to his. In the light of Don Cristóbal's old lamp it looked horrible enough —a mask of half-dried blood and disease and misery.

"What do you want with me?"

"Nothing. Or rather I want to know why you sleep in doorways, Chiquita. Haven't you anywhere to live?"

"No."

"But you had once. Let me see if I can guess how it all was. Once upon a time—when you were young and lucky and pretty too, no doubt—you went away to a strange town—Madrid, perhaps. And at first you were very lucky indeed. People—men in particular—were very kind to you. And then—things happened, and you weren't quite so lucky any more. And you came home—to die perhaps. But no one will have anything to do with you. You can't even die decently."

"What has that to do with you?"

"It has occurred to me that we might be of use to one another, Chiquita."

"Yes. I daresay. I know what you want."

"No, you don't. Believe me—you really don't. I am one of

the few men who ask nothing of a woman. On the other hand, I offer you a home with me."

"They say you're mad."

"Not madder than most of my countrymen, Chiquita. The home will not be a very splendid one. At the moment the roof leaks. But that can be mended. And you will be safe and have enough to eat for as long as you live."

"What do you want of me?" she repeated bitterly.

He looked down at her with a harsh ironical understanding for her disbelief.

"I am not pretending to be virtuous. And I am not making fun of you. I'm rather drunk. But I'm not really mad. One of these days a wise man from the north will come to us and we shall both swear before Almighty God that we are living in sin together. It won't be in the least true, but in my God-fearing country nobody minds that."

"Let me go, señor—oh, please let me go——"

She seemed to collapse utterly. He heard her sobbing under her breath. He dropped her arm with a movement of sudden indifference.

"Very well," he said, "but when you are very ill and hungry —and perhaps frightened—think it over."

IV

1

Baise was giving a little dinner at the Savoy in honour of his engagement to Claire. It was a form of festival wildly outside the means of an unsuccessful gentleman farmer, but as Baise explained apologetically the hens were laying well and the weather was so bad it was bound to get better. Besides he had never been engaged before and didn't intend to get engaged again. He turned toward Claire as he spoke and laughed to make sure that she knew he was being funny. And Claire laughed, too, rather uncertainly as though, in fact, she wasn't quite sure. Baise did not know how young and pretty she was looking. But he did know that she was in white—just as he knew that Jane's dress was some red colour. "I can feel the warmth," he said.

Baise had come to fetch the three sisters from the Lindesfarnes' place in Lyall Street. For Justine was living there until Nat could come home. (The little house in Half Moon Street had its shutters up and a notice board hung like a wooden flag from a post tied to the area railings.) Clive and Elizabeth Lindesfarne looked into the drawing room to say good-night before they went on to their own private celebration. Clive Lindesfarne celebrated easily and well. He enjoyed good food, good wine, and good-looking women with a robust adult enthusiasm. And best of all he enjoyed going out to an expensive dinner with Elizabeth alone. It savoured deliciously of scandal. He dressed and insisted on her dressing as though they were in fact on the verge of a magnificent but illicit intrigue—a point of view which Elizabeth Lindesfarne accepted with

stimulating disapproval. But it was not a bored disapproval, and it heightened his conviction that there was something improper and outrageous in making love to her. Best of all he knew that she had always eluded him. That was glorious in itself. He might try his hardest, but there was always a new door to be charmed or forced open. And beyond that another and another. One night—to-night perhaps—he might make the triumphant and final conquest. But he rather hoped he wouldn't.

"None of you enjoy yourselves like I do," he said, looking the party over with disapproval. "You're a poor gone-to-seed crowd without guts."

"My dear Clive——" Elizabeth Lindesfarne murmured.

"Anybody would enjoy life who is so abominably good-looking as he is," Justine retorted, "and who knew it so well!"

"Dear child," Clive Lindesfarne flashed back, "realizing your strong and fortunate likeness to myself I cannot take the compliment as entirely disinterested."

They laughed at one another. On the surface everything was very jolly and happy. But Clive Lindesfarne had covered over a serious reflection with a joke. These young people were queer fish. Such unusually nice-looking, well-bred young people. It was difficult to see why they impressed him as being all to pieces. And they were so involved and complicated. He didn't know what was the matter with them. Justine in particular. He loved Justine. Jane was too young to be interesting and Claire he considered to be a donkey without a donkey's virtues. But Justine was a glorious human being—just like himself, as he had said. He admired everything about her—her poise and fleet sure strength, her air of courage, the way she spoke and looked and dressed. She understood her own type so perfectly. She knew that the straight, simple lines of her frock and its daring copper colour set off her own lithe straightness and the dark red hair and red-brown eyes. She had something that was better than a cut-and-dried beauty. And what she had physically was warmed and illuminated by intelligence and a gener-

ous temper. And yet unhappy. Something wrong somewhere. He felt he ought to understand because she was his daughter and so like himself. Perhaps being a woman made a greater difference than he had allowed for. Passionate they both were. They might both have gone very wrong—made a complete mess of things. He very nearly had—but had been caught in the nick of time. Elizabeth had caught him and had kept him busy and excited in perpetual quest of her. And Justine had found Gale. Anybody would have supposed that Gale would have contented any reasonable woman—a dynamic, vital fellow, with brains, too. Justine's perfect counterpart. But something had gone wrong somewhere. That damned Nat Wynne had appeared on the horizon—a heavy, rather stupid soldier as Clive Lindesfarne remembered him from one casual meeting, remarkable for nothing except a sort of silent, driving pertinacity.

There was the War, of course. When you couldn't find any other acceptable explanation there was always the War to fall back on. The young people when they were drunk or wouldn't work or ran off with each other's wives or husbands insisted that the War was to blame. The War had knocked the bottom out of their lives and worst of all out of their natural youthful illusions. They said they had lost faith in politics and patriotism and religion and even in themselves and each other. They didn't believe in their own virtues. Perhaps it was all true—though Lindesfarne suspected them of a rather calculated exaggeration and of playing to the gallery. Certainly it was absurd to be disillusioned about politics. On the other hand, they had seen beastly things while they were too young and had their private adventure swamped. Lindesfarne admitted that it was too bad. If there had been any sense in things, the old people ought to have done the fighting on all sides. And for the future there ought to be some national arbitration on the matter. The old people would have enjoyed themselves—as Clive Lindesfarne had done. They wouldn't have been disillusioned at all. On the contrary, they would have come back cock-a-whoop with self-

satisfaction and delight at having participated in such a magnificent and virile adventure just at a time when all adventuring had seemed over for them. And those that didn't come back would have had their lives and a clean vigorous death to boot—instead of dying stuffily in the humiliating circumstances of decay.

Lindesfarne had gloried in his life on the trawler. It had seemed almost too good to be true. And being by nature of another age he wasn't hypersensitive about death and wounds. And it was wonderful to come back to Elizabeth like a young man.

He sighed regretfully.

"Well—and who are the other members of the party, Baise?"

"Frank Carstans and Elliot—Guy Elliot. I don't think you've ever met him, sir. We knocked up against each other when I was invalided out. He was in the R. A. M. C. An awfully decent fellow."

"Selected as suitable for Baby Jane, I suppose."

"Oh, shut up!" She flushed up angrily. There were tears in her eyes. But Clive Lindesfarne didn't even know. He had caught sight of Justine. He saw that she had been on the verge of some quick urgent protest—and then had gone dead white in the effort of silence. So profoundly was he aware of her distress—whatever its cause—that involuntarily he took a step toward her as though he would have come to her support. But as quickly he recognized her faint gesture, made to him only, which besought his obliviousness. He turned away, dismayed and half angry at his inability to cope with what was going on about him, and gathered up his hat and coat.

"Well—we'd better be going."

Elizabeth hadn't noticed anything, thank goodness. Or if she had she would outdo him in reticence. Probably in the whole course of their lives she and Justine had never really spoken to each other. He took her arm. "Have a good time—if you know how," he said lightly over his shoulder.

"The old people are getting superior and impertinent," Justine mocked at him. But she smiled kindly. She wanted to reassure him—it was only a twinge of toothache—anything that didn't matter. "They think the world belongs to them."

"We'd better be going, too," Baise said. "We can't be more than an hour late."

For some reason or other he felt bewildered—out of his depth. It was like a sudden mental blindness. He couldn't see what people were up to in their minds. And it bothered him with a new sense of clumsiness. Instinctively he put out his hand for Claire. But she had moved away and he touched Jane's arm instead. They drew back sharply as though they had hurt each other.

2

Claire had done a brave thing—the bravest thing she had ever done in her life. She had asked Baise Lindesfarne to marry her. She had stood up straight in front of him like a rather frightened child saying its lesson. "Baise—if you really want me still——" She had expected something tremendous to happen. But he had waited with his poor face not quite turned to her, after the pathetic manner of blind people, and then had begun to laugh like a man near tears and trying to save himself. He had put his hands on her shoulders. "Claire—you darling—you poor darling——" And she had felt that he was terribly sorry for her and that he didn't believe in the very least that she meant it. But she had meant it. That was the extraordinary thing. A barrier had broken down in her somewhere and her timid love crept out, like a half-blinded, bewildered prisoner, and took refuge in him. It was a very frightened—very inarticulate love. There was nothing fierce or overwhelming about it to sweep them both off their feet. And if he had been passionately glad it might have frightened her. Or perhaps she would have been glad, too. She didn't know—it was so hard to tell. But she had a poignant, hurting memory of that scene—of her pretty

little room with the firelight dancing on the pale walls and of the two of them—stammering, overcome by a pitiful embarrassment.

Se had made him believe at last. But it had cost her frightfully. She had been on the point of breaking down altogether. And then suddenly he had seemed to understand and been very tender and happy, too. She was sure of that. Happy and deeply moved. And they had sat together and made plans—how they should live, and about Peterkins. They had said how fortunate it was that Peterkins and Baise were so fond of each other. It had been the oddest conversation—as though for once they really didn't know what to say. He hadn't touched her again—until he left. Then she had seen his uncertainty—his pathetic doubt. And it was she who had come to him and for the first time kissed him. And then he had put his arms round her. But it was with such a gentle protecting tenderness. And her love wanted to blaze up—consume them both with its brave fire.

She looked at him shyly. And as though he felt her glance he turned and smiled toward her. Of course he was happy. It was the place—its smooth elegance, its flat denial of ugly unfortunate things, that accentuated his look of rather haggard gravity. It didn't suit him to be away from his fields. Once, of course, he had been very gay and pleasure-loving. But that was long ago—before the War and before he had lost himself in the wilderness. At that last memory she felt suddenly as though a weight had lifted from her heart. How desperate he had been and how steadfast! And now she had given him the thing he had lived and almost died for.

Someone was drinking to her. It was Frank Carstans. His blue, good-humoured eyes smiled at her. She touched her glass with her lips and smiled back at him—almost apologetically. They were all pleased with her that she had made Baise happy at last. But she couldn't quite lose a sense of distress. It was as though something were wrong and couldn't come right. Perhaps

it would have been happier if Justine hadn't been there—Justine dragging her memories with her like the rags of a fine dress. She looked so hard and reckless. She was drinking too much, Claire thought, and making a sort of furious fun of everything. But she wouldn't dance. Dr. Elliot had asked her and she had shaken her head. Claire thought her curt—almost rude. And Dr. Elliot seemed rather a fine person—the kind of man that Baise would choose for a friend. Perhaps Justine really preferred rotters—dishonourable thieving rotters like this Nat Wynne, for instance.

Jane was having a good time anyway. Of course she was overexcited. But very gay and pretty. It was obvious that Frank was falling heavily for her. He had never seen her really grown-up before. And she was leading him on by not taking much notice of him. In the very middle of one of his hunting stories she turned away from him and asked Claire and Baise why they didn't dance. Claire felt it was rather cruel and thoughtless of her.

"A blind man dancing on the floor of the Savoy would be run in for being drunk and disorderly," Baise said. But he didn't seem hurt. He had flushed up with a boy's pleasure.

"You used to dance so well when you were a kid," Jane persisted. "Justine told me. And Claire could guide you quite well."

"I couldn't," Claire said. "I'm not strong enough."

"Well—I could."

"Try?" Baise asked. He was alight with the adventure of it. "I dare you!"

"I bet you a pair of gloves we don't bump once!"

"Taken!"

He stood up. Across his place Jane and Claire met each other's eyes. Claire didn't know what it meant—why Jane should look so defiant and triumphant and wretched, too. But she did know that when the two moved off together—Jane with her hand lightly on Baise's arm—she herself was overtaken by a chill unhappiness.

It couldn't be avoided any more. Claire and Frank Carstans were dancing together. After a moment's thoughtful hesitation Guy Elliot came over and sat beside her.

"I don't dance very well," he said. "Still—won't you really give me a trial?"

"I'd rather not—if you don't mind."

He accepted her irritable decision silently. But his silence was neither offended nor awkward. It was a companionable thing. And in spite of her resentment at this fortuitous encounter she could not help liking him. The first poignant impression that he had made on her that afternoon in the gray ghostly waiting room remained and was even curiously reenforced. He had seemed to her the very embodiment of human compassion and understanding at its loftiest. Men of his profession had, for the most part, come out of the War either hardened or broken. But he had retained his sanity and his pity. The effect of that tremendous spiritual effort was stamped on him. Even against this conventional background and in the teeth of her bitter incredulity she recognized him as one of those people who stand testimony to something permanent and ultimately triumphant in the human spirit.

He began to talk at last—casually, as though she were an old friend to whom he could think aloud.

"It's queer, isn't it, how things have gone on? We all thought that the War would put an end to our old world. Nothing would ever be the same again. And in fact nothing—and nobody has changed much."

"Is that anything to boast about?" she asked flippantly.

"Oh, I know there's a bad side to it. But we might have lost the good we had and not gained much. There's something rather reassuring in the way we have come back to ourselves. Our funny old traditions and way of doing things—like gnomes and fairies scared into their hiding places and creeping out one by one to see if it's all clear again—you know, the Guardsmen in their shakos, the Lord Mayor in his gold coach—and all

these people so well dressed and so pleasant—are still here just as though a cyclone had never blown them off the earth. It may all be very stupid. But I'm glad of it. I like them. They're so illogical and unreasonable, and sane and human—with one foot in this world and one somewhere in romance. Perhaps that's why you can't really knock them out. They've always got another world to take refuge in."

She smiled at the conceit.

"We could lose one world altogether," she said, "but we'd still have ourselves. We wouldn't care much. We'd take to writing poetry seriously again and Shakespeare would come along, and then casually a Drake and a Raleigh in a couple of crazy aëroplanes, and before we knew anything about it we'd be running an empire in the moon. We wouldn't know how it had happened and we wouldn't care. Though we'd be sure to say it was an awful nuisance."

They laughed. The impersonal fantasy, if it had not lessened her intense awareness of the brief part he had played in her life, had made it bearable. She wondered if he knew about Gale and herself. If he did, how would he look on her? Not with contempt—she was sure of that—but still with a penetrating knowledge that made her feel that she was stripped naked. Well—he was accustomed to nakedness—and its ugliness and pitifulness.

His hand played idly with his glass. A very fine, delicate hand. She remembered that at the time and in spite of her terror and mad weariness she had noticed its fineness and been reassured. It had taken her hand firmly and held it. He had said over and over again:

"It's all right—it's all right——"

Ridiculous to remember that she had actually fallen against his shoulder and burst out crying. She had never cried like that before. But for three days and nights she had been fighting her way to Gale—against officialdom, bored and inhuman, entrenched in foul-smelling offices, by trains that jolted and

stopped and jolted again and stood for hours in hideous sidings while the streams of living men flowed westward, sometimes losing track of Gale altogether, growing accustomed to the raised eyebrows, the pursed lips, the shrug of the shoulders. *"Voyons, Madame, les blessés—on ne sait jamais——"* She hadn't known from one hour to another whether it was of any use any more. She had hardly eaten and had not dared to sleep because the awakening to reality had torn her anguish of mind wide open. She hadn't been brave at all. Only obstinate and desperate. The gallantry that had burned in her during the Serbian retreat, had been extinguished. A vital change had taken place in her since then. Her love for Gale had been a thing of fantasy and fire. Now it had become real. It was her flesh and blood.

The hospital at last—red tape more terrible than barbed wire—the gray waiting room—the revolting stench of death and pain and disinfectant—the round-faced little V. A. D. with her starched, rustling skirts. Yes, they were operating now. She had better wait. That was almost funny. To be invited to wait. A horrible giggle had risen in her throat like a sudden sickness. But after that she had stopped feeling anything. She remembered sitting by the open window and looking out on a shabby French square whose trees were already yellow with late summer. She had been stupefied and breathless like a hunted fox that has beaten its way to its hole and hears the hounds baying and the approach of death.

The door had opened. The moment she had seen this man's face she had felt a resurgence, if not of hope at least of dignity. Whatever he had to tell her he would make the thing worthy and so endurable.

"You are Captain Braddyl's wife——"

She had nodded. And he had put out his hand very quickly.

"It's all right—it's all right."

"He is going to live?"

"Yes—I believe so."

"Is he suffering?"

"Not now."

And then she had broken down. And after a while he had sat beside her and talked to her earnestly and intently as though hers were the only tragedy in the world.

"You see—it isn't so simple."

She had hardly been able to listen. Gale was going to live—Gale was going to live. He was coming back to her. Then it was all right. Everything was all right. This gravity—this strange look of poignant wisdom—was almost ridiculous. There was no tragedy—no tragedy in the whole world now that Gale was to live and to come back to her.

The scene hung in a gray fog between herself and the bright lights and the moving colours of people. It threw the jazz music out of rhythm. Why didn't Nat come home quickly and bring her into step with life again? It was unbearable. She felt that she might begin to laugh hysterically. She had drunk too much of poor Baise's champagne. And he couldn't afford it either. It wasn't that she cared any more. But she could remember how she had cared. And that was worse.

Elliot was speaking again.

"I'm a rotten dancer. But I do enjoy it so. I wish you'd try."

She stood up gratefully.

"I've won my bet," Jane was saying. "We haven't bumped once."

"Don't crow. There wasn't any time limit. I may dance with you again."

"You can't. You're engaged to Claire."

"Not as a dancer. She won't have me. But she won't grudge a poor clod-hopping farmer the chance to shake a leg."

"You shake it awfully well."

"In my young days I used to win prizes for deportment. You should have been born earlier."

"Why?"

"Why, then you'd have seen me in my prime."

"You're in your prime now."

"Gracious no. I'm old—hoary with age."

"What makes you think you're old?"

"The way I feel. Or don't feel. One day you'll know what I mean."

"You mean—one doesn't care so much?"

"Well—one takes things more quietly."

She said under her breath, "I'm glad of that."

They danced on.

"We go awfully well together, don't we? You're a marvel, Jane. You're like a pair of eyes. You make me feel I'm really doing it all."

"Baise—are you happy?"

"What a question! Of course I'm happy. What do you think the party's for?"

"I meant—awfully happy."

"Awfully happy, then."

"You've got what you wanted?"

"What I've wanted all my life."

"I wonder what it feels like—to get what you've wanted all your life."

"That's beyond me. I can't tell you. It's different though——"

"—to what you expected?"

"Well—when you're young you're different. That's what I mean."

"I see. When you were young you went and lost yourself in a jungle—because Claire was marrying Peter."

"That's the legend. Not being able to shoot Peter, I shot tigers instead."

"Oh, don't be funny."

"I have to be."

"Because it was so serious?"

"Well—you can't be serious about serious things—no if you're a plain Englishman like me."

"And now you've got what you wanted."

"You've said that before, old thing."

"Then why can't you be serious?"

"Jane—you're too complicated."

The music was hiccoughing to an end.

"Baise, does shooting tigers help?"

"I should say so."

"Where can one find tigers?"

"They're getting very scarce. Why do you ask?"

She released herself from his arms.

"Oh, I might want to do some shooting myself—some day."

Somehow poor Baise's party hadn't been a great success after all. Celebrations often weren't. They lacked spontaneity. On the way home everybody tried to be very gay so that he shouldn't feel it—or shouldn't at any rate know that they felt it. It was too bad. Baise was so generous and anxious to make everybody happy. They were glad when they reached Lyall Street and were able to let themselves go and not have to pretend any more. Baise stood on the pavement. He wouldn't come in. He didn't seem to know quite what to do—whether to kiss Claire or not. For almost the first time they realized his blindness. And Claire looked up at him, distressed and pale. She wanted to say: "I do love you. I've never loved anybody before. I'd die if I lost you now." And she couldn't even give him a sign —with Jane watching her with those scornful, hostile eyes. In the end Baise just made a general and gallant salute and blundered back into his taxi.

It was lucky that Clive and Elizabeth hadn't come home yet. Nobody to bother one with questions. The three sisters went to their separate rooms in silence. They did not even say "goodnight."

3

They weren't the "young people" any more. He had thought of Baise and Justine and Claire and Jane as the new generation. But they weren't new. Peterkins was new. Justine was thirty-two and Claire close on thirty-eight. Clive Lindesfarne didn't mind so much about Claire. He had a theory that people were born at a definite age which they maintained through life. And Claire at ten had been neither older nor younger fundamentally than she would be when she was an old lady. She had been grave and sedate and faintly priggish as a middle-aged woman in the body of a child is bound to be. So that as she grew older she only became more herself and more likable. But Justine was different. Justine had been born young. The essence of her would always be a brave eighteen. And so it hurt to see the lines of maturity creeping about her mouth and eyes. It even seemed to him that they were coming too fast—as though her body were being subjected to a secret grinding pain.

Of course, in one sense, they were all young. But Peterkins was the only one of the family who was new. Even Jane bore the stigmata of the old generation. Peterkins had escaped it by the skin of his teeth. He had both feet firmly planted in the new world. He knew nothing personally about a time when there had been no motor cars or aëroplanes or telephones. Though he had been born in 1916 he had not the faintest recollection of the War. Claire had seen to that—keeping him hidden in the fastness of Peter the Elder's Welsh home. When you talked affectionately of air raids and mine-sweeping he looked as interested as he would have been in any other fragment of ancient history. He wasn't hurt by the past or fretted by the present. And the future was his. All of which made Peterkins a very entertaining but disconcerting and alien figure. Clive Lindesfarne felt that by the time Peterkins and his kind were grown up he would be glad to get out.

But his own children, he felt sure, were closer to him than

the children of other generations had been to their parents. They had vital memories in common. There was no real difference between them except that being older he was at heart younger. At any rate he had had his youth, and its fire and radiance lingered in him like the afterglow of a fine day. Theirs had gone down in cloud and storm. No one could foretell what would be left for them at the end.

Elizabeth didn't see it like that. She didn't understand how people could be so thrown out of their course. She had lost Geoff and no one would ever have known that she so much as suffered. But if she was both puzzled and critical she had the virtue of her good breeding which prevented useless reproaches. Even on the night that Justine, calm and ironical, utterly distraught as Clive had known from one look at her, had arrived unannounced at Whiteladies with the brief statement that she and Gale had separated, she had merely given orders that Justine's old room should be got ready. Nor had Justine's further elaboration of the situation—her almost fierce insistence on the facts—broken down the older woman's implacably courteous reserve. She had said afterward, "One can't do that sort of thing." It had been her only comment. But he knew everything that she meant by it. Her kind couldn't break with tradition and survive as personalities. It meant disruption. She didn't realize that Justine wasn't altogether "her kind." She was "his kind," too. She had added to Elizabeth's capacity for hard endurance something of his flexibility and weakness—his liability to fall and his power of picking himself up. If Elizabeth broke with her code it would be the end. Anything might happen to her. She might become quite horrible—wicked and debased. But he and Justine could sin heavily and still keep their heads up—still hold some flag or other flying.

So that he could talk to Justine, and Elizabeth never could.

Claire had gone back to Peterkins and her cottage. There was a great deal to be done. The farm had got to be made habitable

for her coming, and Peterkins would have to be detached gently from her apron strings—a process which he had already begun for himself. Clive supposed that she and Baise would see a good deal of each other and be happier without interference from Whiteladies and had firmly negatived any suggestion of a return to the country. Perhaps the two of them, left alone, would be able to shake off the queer new awkwardness which had seemed to fall upon them with their engagement. At any rate, keeping away was the best he could do for Claire. He didn't get on with her. She was Elizabeth's child. She had Elizabeth's reserve without the temperament which had made that reserve so stimulating. Claire reminded him of a woolly lamb tied by the leg to a giant chain. He was often very sorry for her, but more often irritated.

Jane was all right. Jane was having a grand time. It was her first real London season and Frank Carstans was mad about her. But it was too early for her to bother about him. She had to have her fling first. Perhaps she was going at it a little too hard. She had a tired, driven way of pushing back the straight, dark fringe that Clive didn't like. But he wasn't going to worry about her. Jane was made of good stuff. She'd find her feet in time.

But Justine—— That was another matter. It was one thing to get drunk out of sheer joy of life and another to get drunk out of disgust or a desperate need of forgetfulness. Justine didn't seem able to sit still. She was out every night. The men these days didn't care whether a woman was married or unmarried or divorced so long as she amused them. They took her on her merits. And Justine was like a cocktail to them. She was gay and brilliant and quite hard so that they knew they didn't stand a chance, and were much relieved in consequence. With Justine they knew they were safe from everything but a good time.

But what was happening behind that façade of polished self-sufficiency? When was this precious fellow in India going to

make his appearance? And what did she know about Gale? Clive Lindesfarne worried about Gale. He had liked the younger man better than any friend of his own generation. Not that he had understood him. From the start there had been something concealed about him—something tragic and rather desperate which didn't fit in with Jane's schoolgirl's description of him and with the reckless, headlong marriage—not to mention the affair of Philippe and Isabella. Clive Lindesfarne, who had only met Gale after these events, had pictured a gay, assured fellow—a sort of suave and elegant buccaneer after his own heart. Instead he had seemed, in some obscure way, baffled and beaten. Once at least Clive Lindesfarne had caught an expression in the rather astonishing eyes that had prepared him for some wild outburst of confession—an appeal for help—he didn't know what. And nothing had happened. That full, young mouth and stubborn jaw set themselves in silence.

But at least Clive Lindesfarne had to know what Justine knew.

He was at once casual and direct about it.

"And when," he said with his shoulders to the mantelshelf in his favourite attitude of complete negligence, "—when are we to expect Captain Wynne? And what the hell are we going to do with him when he does come?"

Justine was writing a letter. She was, in fact, writing to Nat, and oddly glad to talk about him. It was a difficult letter. She looked up at her father and smiled. He pleased her very much. Really, socialists had no sense in wanting to abolish a race of people so charming and ornamental and, in their own way, effective.

"Captain Nathaniel Wynne is unavoidably detained," she said in the same ironic tone. "When he does arrive we shall run away with him."

"May I ask what unavoidably detains Captain Nathaniel Wynne?"

"A trifling episode with some tribesmen on the Afghanistan frontier. Even I, with my limited sense of duty, can't ask him to send in his papers until that is over. He cabled me that he might get leave again—or exchange into a home regiment."

"In the event of your running away there won't be any question of either alternative," Clive Lindesfarne remarked. "The Army is an out-of-date machine. It is a stickler for conventional virtue."

"There will be a divorce——"

"The Army doesn't like divorce, either."

"We've discussed that."

"So Captain Wynne is willing to throw up his career?"

"He seemed to think it worth while——"

"And yet he is talking about leave and an exchange. I don't quite understand."

Justine frowned down at an unfinished sentence. It was difficult to explain Nat to anyone who didn't know him well. He had a reasonableness that didn't go with his relentless pursuit of her. He would go to hell to get her. But if there were a circuitous and less costly way he would prefer to take it.

"I suppose you're counting on Gale doing the dirty work," Mr. Lindesfarne suggested rather bitterly.

"I'm not—anyway. I wouldn't stand it. Nat knows that."

"He might think that rather unfair. After all, it's his career and your reputation against Gale's purely technical and temporary disgrace."

Justine was silent for a moment. That was exactly Nat's point of view. She had to gather herself together not to give way to a burst of nervous impatience.

"It can't be done," she said with forced lightness, "and that's all there is to it."

"Why stick at a trifle?" he wanted to know.

"You may well ask. It seems ridiculous that I should stick at anything. But I do. And you'll have to take my word for it."

"All right. I do."

She went on as though she were ashamed of being so rough and hard with him:

"You see—I've been an utter cad where Gale's concerned. I know it. But I have my limits. To take advantage of him like that would be a sort of last insult."

"Yes—I see."

She smiled rather wanly.

"No, you don't, dear. But you'll pretend nicely. And that's all I ask."

"You haven't heard from Gale, I suppose."

"No."

"Would you be glad to?"

"No," she repeated sharply.

"Would you be glad to hear of him?"

He saw her make a quick movement of the hands as though she might have torn up the half-written letter in front of her from sheer nervous irritation.

"Yes, I would. It's not that I care—Gale and I had worn each other out. But I've got what people have when they've no decent feeling left—a conscience."

"Well—Powell has heard."

"Alfred Powell?" She looked at him with a frowning incredulity. "How ridiculous!"

"It seemed so—— But after all he had to have someone to look after things and I daresay he wanted to keep Edward Braddyl out of it. Poor little Powell, being a lawyer, fitted the case. Besides Gale knew that he'd been fond of both of you."

"That makes it—somehow—so intolerable."

"I'm sorry—it can't be helped now. Gale wrote from some place in Spain—Castello de la Virgen I think it was called. He said he was sending evidence that would make it easy for you. He was living with some woman——"

He stopped, aware that after the first two sentences she had no longer listened. Her face was turned away from him. And now she was quite still.

"Gale always had a sense of the dramatic," she said in a low, composed voice he did not recognize. "That's where we met for the first time."

"Justine—I'm sorry."

"There's nothing to be sorry about. It's rather—rather funny. What's Alfred going to do?"

"He's going out there. He says he must see Gale. He's terribly upset over the whole business."

She stood up straight. The façade had broken with a vengeance. She turned to him a face so white and angry, so tormented and embittered that he had hard work to hide his own consternation.

"He has no right—no business. I won't have him or anyone interfering——"

"My dear, somebody has got to do something."

"Alfred can keep out of it anyway. He is the last person on God's earth who ought to go to Gale."

"But if Gale wants him——"

"He doesn't—he only did that out of bravado, to make me feel what a beast I am, to hurt himself."

The hurricane had blown up suddenly—from nowhere—before either of them knew what was happening. Lindesfarne was careful not to move. He felt that he might be swept off his feet into a rash emotional adventure which both of them might regret. He spoke with rather excessive calmness.

"Well—whatever Gale's motive he's perfectly free to do what he likes. And so is Powell, for that matter. And of course it's absurd to think that Powell wants to hurt you. He can think of nothing but you and Gale. It's as though you had smashed a secret romance of his own. He can't believe it——"

"I don't want him to. There's only one thing I want, and that is to be left alone."

"That's what we all want," Lindesfarne thrust back at her, "—when we're making a mess of things."

"Why should you say I'm making a mess of things? Isn't that a little presumptuous? I'm not the first person in the world who has found a first marriage a mistake——"

"It wasn't a mistake."

She regarded him fixedly. He found himself wondering in a detached way whether his own eyes, which were like hers, were looking as dangerously alive.

"How do you know it wasn't a mistake?"

"I'm not a fool—any more than you were, Justine, when you married Gale."

"I'm not a fool now."

"I don't know what to think. I don't trust your judgment any more. When they wrote me that you'd walked into a registry office with Gale Braddyl—and mind you, I hadn't even set eyes on the fellow—I said, 'That's all right, Justine knows her man.' I wouldn't say that now."

"That's because you don't know——"

"Well, I want to. Damn it all, Justine, I've got some claim——"

"Yes, you have. Very well. I'll tell you." Her clenched hand was pressed hard down on the table. Lindesfarne felt that for the moment she hated him for what he was doing to her, and had herself become ruthless. She spoke slowly and harshly. Every word was like a stone which she tore out of the depths of herself. "Gale and I weren't husband and wife," she said. "Not really. After that first day we never lived together. Never. When they sent him back to me he was a sick man in body and mind. Everything went wrong between us. We got on each other's nerves. We nagged each other to death. And we couldn't —while things were like that—we were too fastidious. Think of it like that. Just too fastidious. And then I fell in love with Nat—madly, physically in love. I had the devil of a time with myself. But I did hold out. Just as long as Gale and I were under one roof—I had to. But it was touch and go. If Nat hadn't gone away when he did—— But he did go. I let him go.

It was my last effort. And then Gale behaved like a madman. He said things—— They set me free. And now I am free—I've got to live my full life as a human being."

Lindesfarne had not flinched. He was very conscious that he had not flinched. After all he had called the thing down on his own head. He had to stand the gaff. But these young people—for they were young, after all—they were different—rather terrible. Admirable, too, in their queer way, with their unexpected codes and bewildered courage. Too fastidious. That was a new idea. Not so bad either. But anyhow it wasn't a case of sitting in judgment. If the last years hadn't taught people anything else, it had taught them that much. Behind the subsiding noise and dust was just someone who belonged to him and to whom he belonged and who was frightfully, badly hurt. He didn't know what drove him to a last question. It sounded hatefully pertinacious in his own ears.

"Is that all the truth?"

"No," she said. "It isn't." Her voice had changed. It had lost all trace of resentment. It was quiet and very unhappy. "There are other things—but they belong to Gale and me. No one else has a right to them. There is just this—that I did fail him. I hadn't enough love—enough compassion. I don't know whether anyone else would have done better. I wish I did. Anyhow I am as God made me. Perhaps that's just a pitiful excuse."

She wanted to make an end. She had sat down again, crouched over her letter, pretending to write as though after all nothing much had happened. But her hand shook. She kept on trying to control it. Lindesfarne looked away. It was terrible to see anyone like Justine fighting so helplessly with herself.

"I'm awfully sorry," he said. "I mean—at butting in like that. I didn't realize. And I don't know that I've gained much—except humility. No—I don't even know anything. But at least I know that I don't know. Enough to leave you alone——" He added after a moment "—and do my best to make other people leave you alone—your mother, too——"

She smiled unsteadily. It was the first time, since they were young children, that he had spoken of Elizabeth as mother. The title annoyed him. And people who called each other mummy and daddy made him sick. He maintained that parenthood was an incident on which it was idiotic to insist. So that the formality revealed how far he had been driven back onto the elemental fact of their relationship. "Not that your mother is likely to interfere," he added rather ruefully.

"And I don't want Mother—or anyone—to know what I've told you. I don't want people prying—thinking things. Gale and I quarrelled. That's enough. And it's true, too."

"All right. I promise."

"And I don't want Mr. Powell to go—but if he does—tell him to tell Gale—not to try to do anything. It can't help me. I couldn't bear it. You see—it's my funeral."

"All right," he repeated. The situation was growing cold. Another minute or two and they'd be overwhelmed with embarrassment. He stood up, straightening his shoulders. "Well, I've got to buzz off. Some damn luncheon or other." He strolled toward the door and then came back and laid his cheek against hers. "You know—we are your people after all. And we are trying to be decent."

"You are decent. You're all beastly magnanimous. I do love you. Try to believe that—though I am behaving so rottenly."

"Of course." He added hurriedly: "Don't mind having told me. Don't bear a grudge, old thing. I haven't really understood—just that it wasn't as I thought—and that I'm not so clever either——"

She took his hand from her shoulder and kissed it.

"I do love you," she repeated.

"Well, that's all right then, isn't it?"

She heard the door close. It was easy now to go on with that broken sentence. A dead emotion had been whipped back to life again and set her free.

"—not because I'm selfish or perverse, but just because there are things one cannot do, dear. I've trusted you so completely. You must trust me. And come when you can. Not before you ought—just when you can. For though everyone is good to me I am so bewildered and alone."

V

1

THE room was crowded with a lost loveliness. Treasures that grim, hard-pressed men, sick for beauty, had rescued from their fierce struggle for existence, were gathered together between the faded walls. They were like refuges from an inundation whose tumultuous tides had long since withdrawn, leaving them and the house and the village to stagnation and dark, tragic memories. They were delicate, well-born souls. After long persecution they had found sanctuary and now waited with dignity and patience for the end. For they were very poor and very frail. At a rough movement they and the old man who sat in the midst of them might have melted into shadows of themselves. Their loveliness was the brief loveliness of death. But corruption had set in. The stately chairs and tables were crumbling secretly. A thin veil of mould lay over the retable above the massive stone fireplace and pale, saintly faces looked through dimly as from a receding, defeated world of spiritual things. But at least they and the old man belonged to each other. They had the serenity of their oneness. The books that melted into the brown walls and crowded to the embossed ceiling, the strange weapons of antiquity, the old hourglasses whose sands had ceased to measure themselves with time, the golden globes and maps of a fabulous world, the ruined tapestries, encircled the central figure in silent, faithful attendance. They seemed to watch him patiently as he sat there turning over the yellow leaves of his book. For his faded eyes sought out a past

to which they belonged and which at nightfall he conjured back to a living, glowing present.

The narrow windows looked out on the one side onto the street and on the other toward the cemetery and beyond the cemetery to the mountains. The windows stood open. But the very air that moved in a slow dance through the hot sunlight was impregnated with the stale odour of decay. Gale noticed that the stream which flowed down the southern slopes of the Montaña de la Virgen had become a white thread. The broken iron gates of the cemetery stood crookedly open. Two men were at work. The stony soil piled up slowly beside them. The short dead grass and the uneven mounds lay under a thin pall of white dust.

Gale, with his arms folded, leaned negligently against the window and watched. The idea that some time or other he himself might make a corner of that particular graveyard "forever England" moved him to a faint sardonic amusement. He wondered if the native dead would resent his intrusion as bitterly as did the native living. Perhaps since the sun had burned him to the colour of the red-brown earth they wouldn't notice him. Not that an outward conformity helped much. In some respects he had already melted into his background. He had come to wear his faded and tattered English clothes as the peasants wore their own heterogeneous rags, with an easy indifference—that much was no doubt native to himself. He lived like a peasant. But he was not one of them. There was something about him that was inimical to their cold, sharp austerity of mind and body. He knew that beneath their distrust of him as a stranger and a heretic they despised him as uncouth and rough and childish. It made no difference to him. He had not wished for heir friendliness. And in spite of them he was at home with their earth. It was as though, missing the alien strain that fed their lean dark spirit, he touched some older life. Physically at least, with his pale, thick hair and intensified blue eyes, he might have been a throw back to some Visigothic ancestor of

the old man who watched him covertly with that dim tormenting hunger.

"It grieves me," Don Cristóbal murmured repeatedly. "It grieves me."

"And I regret to grieve you, señor," Gale returned. But in fact he did not care. The old half-wit was no concern of his. He heard the book close with a soft tragic finality.

"It grieves me because I have grown to love you. If you had been called away in some honourable duty I should still have grieved. For I have grown accustomed to the intercourse with your mind and through your mind with the many things I have forgone all my life. Still—I could have prayed for you."

"The flesh must have its way, Don Cristóbal," Gale interrupted brutally.

The Spaniard lifted a thin brown hand.

"It must not. We pursue shadows. That is the greatest shadow of them all. Señor, I have desired many things passionately. I have desired women. I once desired a woman till I could not see to right or left for desire of her. But I was poor. I had nothing but my name and this old house. There was no one here with whom I could have honourably mated. And honour was my last and greatest possession. I chose to go my way alone, señor. I thank God and the Holy Virgin that I have had the strength."

Gale looked down at him thoughtfully. The daylight stripped him of the night's fantastic grandeur. He was a poor old fellow. His clothes that María had bought no doubt from a travelling salesman were shapeless and threadbare. He was not even clean. But he did not look defeated. After all, his madness might be less madness than the symbolic dream of a reality. He had held the fort. And if the fort was not worth holding and if the inmates had died or gone crazed in the defence, the sacrifice was, probably, as justified as were most sacrifices.

"You are to be envied," Gale said. "You had a high tradition to uphold and it upheld you. But I haven't. Let me put it

this way, Don Cristóbal. You are an officer of rank to whom certain things are not permitted. But I am a common soldier. And common soldiers have no responsibilities. Nor are they fastidious——"

"I have never sought to know what brought you to us," the old man interrupted with dignified reproach. "I have not pried into your secret. I have taken it for granted that you were driven into this exile by some honourable misfortune. I accepted you as a gentleman——"

Gale moved impatiently.

"I take it that among other things a gentleman is one who cannot be beaten. Fundamentally life can do nothing to him. I have been so badly beaten that I have discovered I am not a gentleman at all—merely a vagabond. As such I have privileges. At least I have no principles."

"You would convince me better, señor, if you had made some other choice. But a woman outcast even from the people—diseased, without charm or virtue——"

"She will make the fewer claims," Gale interrupted. "She will do as I tell her. Conceivably she may be grateful. At least no one else could serve my purpose." He drew himself up from his lounging attitude. "Do not think that I am eager to leave you, señor," he added with more gentleness. "You have been kind and tolerant. You have believed well of me. I shall not forget——"

"I have done nothing that I did not owe my own honour," was the grave answer. He stood up painfully. But he did not offer his hand. He was making an end. "Go with God, señor."

Gale turned away. But he had not escaped the look of unconscious, desperate pleading. He said roughly:

"You should not be so friendless. I am a chance visitant. You could not expect that I should stay here rooted in your house forever."

"Señor, I did not expect it. It was human to be happy."

"There are others. Father Valeza is an educated man. Yet

you hold aloof from each other—in this God-forsaken place—as though you were enemies."

Back of their film an ominous gleam had kindled in the old eyes.

"He is my enemy. For he is a traitor. He serves God with his lips. But in his heart are mockery and indifference. If ever disaster should fall on this unhappy village—if ever we should be overwhelmed——" He put his hand quickly to his head as though brushing away the mist of a dream. "Father Valeza commits blasphemy," he muttered. "He betrays God."

Gale shrugged his shoulders.

"Well—leave him to God. It is not your business."

"There are follies beyond your understanding, señor."

Gale accepted the implication of his heresy.

"And beyond yours, Don Cristóbal. Let's leave it at that. We have to do what we must. You must go your mad way and I mine—and Father Valeza his. And heaven help the lot of us!"

Don Cristóbal bowed.

"I love you so much, señor," he said, "that I shall pray for you."

He went back quickly to his book, covering his eyes with his hand, and Gale knew that he was crying the weak tears of old age and loneliness. It made him angry and he went out onto the bare white landing without so much as a good-bye or a thank you. María, with her hands under her apron, waited for him. He tried to push past her. But she was very strong. It was like having the claws of a battered savage old vulture digging into his own.

"You commit a great sin, señor. There is a curse on that woman. And the curse will fall on you."

"Mind your own business," he told her.

"And you will break his heart."

"Yes, that's all you care about."

"It is all I have ever cared about."

Her tone arrested him. He was accustomed to her sharp,

bitter tongue—not to this grave and melancholy significance. He turned unwillingly to meet her eyes. They were extraordinarily alive in a face that seemed already set in the lines of death. They were like the eyes of a forgotten captive peering out of an old crumbling prison. "He needs you, señor; he cannot live without you."

"He has lived without me all his life."

"Men can endure hunger for many days. There comes a time when they must eat or die."

"He has you to look after him."

"I am only his servant." She brushed herself aside with a cold humility. "But you are of his kind, señor. He has grown to count on you. When the night madness comes and you are not there he will say that the enemy has slain you and the madness will flame higher and destroy him utterly. And in the daytime he will mourn for you. Señor, I am an old shrewish woman now. But I was not always so. Once I might well have chosen another fate. I might have had my home and children who, when my time came, would bury me with Christian prayers. But I was all that was left him. He trusted me. I could not leave him."

They looked at each other in silence. Her eyes were sly, calculating, pitiful. He saw that to soften him she had brought the sacrifice of a confession. She laid her frustrated life before him.

"And so he went mad for love of you," he reflected. "He was a poor fool, María. He should have taken you."

"He was a nobleman," she retorted fiercely. "I am an ignorant peasant. It is not for you to judge him."

"I don't want to judge him. I don't want to be bothered with him." He picked up his old knapsack which he had propped against the stairs in readiness. He could feel her agonized suspense. "Well—I'm not going far," he muttered. "If you want me I can come back——"

"Every day, señor."

He burst out laughing.

"Oh, very well then, every day."

"I'll tell him, señor. He will watch for you coming up the road."

"You're a she-devil," he said, "and I've no doubt you always were."

She leaned over the banisters, thumping the rail with a vicious fist. She spat at him:

"And you are a foreigner and a heretic. The curse of God on you!"

He kissed his hand to her.

In the vestibule under the retable the villagers had piled together their day's offerings. They had brought bread, a flask of wine, two eggs, a bowl of goat's milk, and on the red-tiled floor someone had dropped a shy and solitary peseta. These things lay in a stream of sunlight and had a still, steadily burning beauty of their own. The faded eyes of the saints gazed over them and met Gale's eyes with their placid challenge. Gale, between exasperation and wry laughter, pulled a face at them. But it was true all the same. You could do what you liked and go where you liked, but you couldn't altogether escape. Even these merciless, hard-bitten peasants couldn't escape.

Pepe and Leah waited outside for him with the patience of people to whom time is of no account. These days Pepe allowed Leah to come quite close to him. He even spoke to her sometimes with a lofty friendliness. And to-day they almost touched each other. For the sun was high up and except in one corner the narrow street full of a blinding, suffocating light. The two of them had changed a good deal in the last weeks. They were still a strange, ragamuffin pair, but they were fat and contented-looking. They belonged to someone. He did not want them, but they belonged to Gale. The other children were nothing to him. And Leah kept the other dogs at bay. They came to the Plaza at dusk to be fed, and some of them would follow at a distance, flairing the unknown quality of this strange

man. But after one bitter fight they came no nearer. They hung on the fringe of this incredible relationship—puzzled and wistful.

Pepe scrambled to his feet. But his greeting was grave and ceremonious. It savoured of displeasure.

"Father Valeza asks to see you, señor," he said, "before you go down there." And he jerked his head toward the plain.

"Accordingly we will go visit him," Gale said. But he knew very well what was going on behind those brown contemplative eyes. He swung his knapsack onto his shoulder. "Señor Pepe," he continued formally, "I am now about to take up residence in my own house. The señora Chiquita has graciously consented to bear me company. If you give me your blessing, well and good. You will be a welcome member of the family. If not you can go to hell."

"Señor—I tell you the truth. The woman is dangerous to men. I am afraid——"

"The curse," Gale interrupted grimly, "is deflected onto my head. I mean by that, Pepe, that she can only curse one man at a time. You can take my word for it that you will be perfectly safe." He told himself that he didn't care. The young monkey could do what he chose and good riddance. Nevertheless he waited rather painfully. "Well—coming or going?" he asked.

The child made a queer little grimace. It expressed distress—the consciousness of final outlawry from his kind and inflexible, almost fatalistic acceptance.

"It cannot be helped, señor, since it is your will. I am coming."

He thrust his hands into his ragged pockets and stepped out bravely. But he would not look at Gale. And every now and then he turned and whistled tremulously over his shoulder to Leah. Gale knew that he was trying not to cry. But he had faced the situation. The four of them belonged to each other and they were all four of them damned.

2

"Who is dead?" Gale asked.

"There is no one dead, señor."

The trestles stood before the altar in readiness. Pedro Beiza, the sacristan, was spreading out the pall with its tarnished silver cross and tattered border. A rat had eaten a hole through the velvet, and Pedro stood there and regarded the ruin in an attitude of mournful resignation. He was quite deaf and did not hear Gale and Pepe's footsteps. He seemed to be waiting for the Virgin to perform a miracle.

It was cooler inside the church. But the gray air, faintly illuminated from a side altar, had a disturbing odour. The sun that sweltered down upon the walls had conjured up a miasma of dust and sweat and stale incense. Old women, their shawls framing their white mystic faces, crouched at the base of the pillars. They looked up at Gale as he passed. There was no intelligence in their eyes but a profound, enigmatic wisdom. Their lips that had been moving with an indistinguishable murmur stiffened into silence.

The side chapel, whence the light came, was crowded with kneeling figures. They murmured and rustled about the feet of a wooden painted Christ outstretched against a crucifix that reared up blackly above the altar. Four candles shone into the livid face that drooped not so much in the resignation of death, but as though the half-opened eyes watched with a hypnotic ecstasy the agony of the convulsed and fleshless limbs. A ghastly thing. The unknown peasant artist had exulted in all that horror. His joy in pain gleamed out of the bright red drops of blood that bespattered the terrible body. But he had created out of truth. Gale knew that much. There was a German soldier—Gale had run him through with a bayonet which he had snatched out of the dead hands of one of his own men. The German's face had worn just that same expression. He

had looked down at his disembowelled body with a sort of calm if slightly astonished interest. Gale remembered how he had enjoyed driving the steel home—the sweet, satisfying lust of it like the consummation of love. And then a machine gun, hidden in a clump of dead brush, had spat at him and bowled him out. He had actually fallen with his face in all that mess. Things like that happened. At first he hadn't felt much. The fight had rolled on, leaving the two of them—like lovers—lying peacefully together under the calm sunlight. And then the German had said something and Gale had come back to full consciousness. Not even when he had kissed Justine after they had belonged to each other had he felt more peacefully exalted. He was uplifted out of chaos by the same sense of exquisite tenderness and compassion. He was like God. He took the German's hand in his. It was a peasant hand, coarse and ill-shaped, and the fact added to their pitiful beatitude. For the German looked at him and the glazing, half-opened eyes were calm with the same wisdom. He spoke again and Gale, who didn't understand, nodded. His last conscious act was to press a tablet of morphine between the gray, quivering lips.

Of course he had wanted Justine to suffer. No woman had ever been so loved. He had watched her suffer with a sort of exultancy. He had hated her. He hated her now. He had suffered himself beyond human expression. For a night and a day he had lain out there, recalling himself by screams which had sounded in his own ears like the strangled howlings of a dog. Then they had found him and he had gone on a pilgrimage through hell to a white ward where he had lain like a red-hot faggot of pain neatly tied up in a white parcel. The sweat had run down his face and he had whimpered with the sheets between his teeth. He hadn't even remembered that Justine existed. And then when the agony had begun to cool and he had come back gasping to the verge of decency that fellow Elliot had appeared. Perhaps he had been there all

the time. Gale supposed that he had. For all through there had been someone whose coming had been like a summons to his last reserves of courage. And now Gale saw him for the first time clearly, standing beside him, his tall, white-clad figure thrown up in relief against the black screen that hid Gale from a neighbouring dissolution.

"It's all right, Braddyl. We've got you safe now—if you don't play any tricks on us. Your wife's here. You're going to see her to-morrow. But there's something I've got to tell you. It's not going to be so easy. But, after all, I know you are a man——"

Not irony but understanding. A woman would not have had that sureness of touch. She would have blundered in the dark place that lay between him and herself. Elliot had sat on the edge of the bed and Gale had listened. He had nodded and said nothing. He remembered tracing a crack across the white ceiling and thinking that it looked like the windings of the Thames. And afterward he had waited till night when a stupor of narcotics lay in a dense fog over the ward. Stealthy steps came and went. They came lightly and went heavily. Gale knew that the bed behind the screen was empty and waiting. And then he had turned over and with his face buried in his arms had cried bitterly.

"But people are going to die," Pepe added nonchalantly.

Gale nodded. There was a chasm and a bridge between this monstrous, tortured effigy and the calm, tender enigma of the Virgin among her clouds. These people crossed and recrossed it indifferently. That was why he had come back to them. Cruelty and love were woven into the very fabric of creation by a God whose own son had to be nailed to a cross before he could be clasped to the bosom of an infinite compassion. Gale felt released and calmed. It was as though in this small dark church his own grief and cruelty and tenderness had been merged for a moment in a universal experience.

The worshippers turned and looked at him. He moved on. The door of the sacristy was closed, but he had seen light under its uneven lintel and he pushed it open and went in. Pepe clung inquisitively to his heels. By the faint reflection from an opening in the stone-paved floor Gale recognized familiar objects: the brass crucifix hanging askew on the white wall, the old worm-eaten cupboard, carelessly left open, with its poor display of shabby vestments and dusty, discarded relics. But the priest and the lamp which was the only source of light in the windowless room had vanished. Except for the table with its feverish litter of books and manuscripts the place might have lain dead for centuries. Gale closed the door quietly. He had a sense of being caught between the hostile forces lowering behind him and the secrets of this dark tormented priest. From now on, inevitably, there would be an intimacy between them that both had stubbornly avoided. But it was too late. Pepe, like a small brown devil, had perched himself on the verge of the descending steps. He beckoned. As Gale approached unwillingly the child's hand slipped into his. It was almost the first time that they had touched each other and for a moment Gale's whole attention was distracted by the warm contact. He felt bewildered and shaken by it. Impatiently he pulled himself free. He knew that the boy was neither surprised nor resentful. He had been repulsed too often. And for the first time this resignation hurt Gale and exasperated him.

"Look, señor!"

They stood together on the verge of an ancient secret grave. Strange things lay buried there—coffin piled upon coffin, collapsed and mouldering into one another, with here and there a fleshless yellow bone thrust out in an indecipherable gesture, altarpieces, banners rotted and in shreds, and books and manuscripts everywhere, some gathered together in a rough order, the rest knee-deep, stretching into obscurity, flung down anyhow in a despairing haste. The musty smell of their

decay was lifted into Gale's face on a dank breath. He motioned Pepe back. The distant light that had been moving hither and thither stealthily and seekingly was coming nearer. It began to mount the steps and Gale heard a sigh as of a soul wearily returning to the world. The priest's head and shoulders came level with the floor. There was something grotesque about his appearance. He reminded Gale of a macabre jack-in-the-box with his *birreta* askew and his twisted, exhausted face gray with dust. He stared at Gale, and his expression of profound discouragement became at once aghast and tragic.

Gale laughed at him.

"Is this the resurrection of the dead?" he said.

Valeza made no answer. With a scornful deliberation as of a man whose whole life in a moment has become ridiculous, he climbed up the remaining steps, set down his lantern, and replaced the stone flag in its square setting. It was very heavy and fitted exactly, and Gale wondered at the expert strength of the man's frail, emaciated body. He waited silently, and the priest straightened himself. He wiped the dust and sweat from his face with a soiled handkerchief, holding it to his mouth for a moment as though hiding a convulsive, uncontrollable emotion.

"It is strange that it never occurred to me that you might be a spy," he said.

"And does it seriously occur to you now?" Gale asked.

"Why not? Why do you come here?"

"You sent for me."

Valeza glanced at Pepe.

"That is true. But you are a stranger. No one knows your business. Only a strong motive could bring a rich man to such a place to live like a beggar."

"And you imagine that that evil-smelling boneyard of yours is a strong motive?"

"Some would think so, señor."

"I see. So after all there was some truth in the rumours——"

"Of what use would it be for me to deny it?" His bitter and sarcastic calm gave way for a moment. "There is no greater collection in the whole of Spain," he said proudly.

"I am glad, for your sake. But it doesn't interest me. I have my own boneyard. My dear Father, let us respect each other's treasure. At least be wise enough to trust me. My intrusion was accidental. You brought it down on your own head."

The priest made an uncertain gesture of acknowledgment.

"It may be that I do you an injustice. I am angry with myself. I have grown careless. The people here believe that I am in communion with the devil. When my door is closed no power on earth would induce them to intrude on me. But I had forgotten that you do not believe in devils. And so I have lost a secret."

"Pepe and I are men of honour," Gale observed gravely.

"It is hard for me to trust anyone." He began to tremble a little like a tree in the first breath of an approaching storm. "I have paid so much for the little I have. These things are mine. I found them when I was a child—playing here in the sacristy. I told no one. It was my secret. I never forgot them. They were in my dreams. I toiled for them. I have given my honour and life for them——"

"And as far as I am concerned you can keep them," Gale interrupted carelessly.

"You can say that—you seem to care for nothing. But there are others—— One careless word and I should have the pack about my ears. Even now when some stray scholar comes to see the Virgin my blood runs cold lest he shall hear the echo under his feet. In the seminary I could think of nothing else. Day and night I prayed that if such a thing should happen God would strike that man dead where he stood."

"Quite a lot to ask—under the circumstances," Gale murmured. He perched himself on the edge of the table and turned over the pages of an illuminated manuscript with careless fingers. "And so, as Don Cristóbal says, you became priest."

"You are shrewd, señor."

"Well, I may be mad too, but I am not a fool."

Valeza pushed a strip of worn carpet back over the stone. He said with a forced and defiant calm:

"There was no other way for me—or for any man situated as I was. I had intelligence. I was born with the love of knowledge and of rare and beautiful things. But I was a peasant. Only the Church could give me what I wanted."

"And so you made a bargain with her."

"It was justified. It shall be justified. When they first sent me to this place which was my home it was like a gesture of reassurance from heaven itself. But that is long ago. The way was to be made hard for me. I have worn out my strength—almost my hope. I have found manuscripts rare enough for a museum. But I have not found what I am seeking. Perhaps I never shall——" He lifted his head sharply. It was as though the admission of doubt had slipped from him and now like an escaped and mocking enemy challenged him. He answered it. The yellow, oddly misshapen face flooded with a feverish colour. "It is not true that I have lost faith. When I was an ignorant child I did not know what might be hidden here. But I did know that whatever it was I must find it before I died. And now I know what I am seeking. In your hand, señor, you hold a copy of Beattus older than any known copy in the world. Who brought it here? I can tell you, for it has been revealed to me by one whose authority no man can question—Beattus himself." He bent toward Gale, seeking his face. He said with a passionate urgency, "You are laughing, señor."

"No, indeed, Father. I am not laughing."

"You must not laugh. For I have proof. I am not mad. I am not like Don Cristóbal. I am not deceived by visions. Beattus worked here—here in this very sacristy. I have seen him. At night, often, he sits here beside me. At first I would not believe my eyes. But then he talked to me—as one scholar

to another. He told me how he and others had fled here for sanctuary from the Moors and how when the end seemed close at hand they had hidden their sacred treasures. He has told me that down there—lost in that chaos—is his own commentary—the blessed original—rotting, decaying. And I may die before I reach it."

"And if you reach it?"

The priest faltered. He reminded Gale of some dark bird winged in full flight. The exultant conviction faded. He looked at Gale with a sad and baffled questioning.

"I do not know. Sometimes I dread to find what I am seeking. What drives me? What drives us all, señor? Each of us has a goal that he must reach. But no one knows why he must reach it."

"God knows," Gale said.

"Ah, you taunt me, señor. And sometimes I believe that in spite of me there is a God who taunts me too." He removed his *birreta* and passed his hand over his dark head. "I am afraid of death," he added under his breath.

"If you are afraid of death," Gale said, "you should find another like yourself who would help you and when the time came would carry on your work."

He had spoken carelessly, out of his hard indifference. Now he saw that the priest had begun to tremble helplessly. He was trying to gather his papers together, but his hands failed him. And suddenly he sat down like a man who has given up a struggle—who yields himself without condition. And for the first time Gale saw the peasant in him, humiliated, beaten by life, not without a stoic dignity.

"You see, señor, they did not teach me a great deal. I was to be a parish priest and if I could chant the Mass and hear confession that was enough. I had to work hard—in secret. Even now—I am a poor scholar. I am slow. I make mistakes. If better men than I should come they would laugh at me.

And presently I should be set aside. They would take away from me all that I have lived for. There would be nothing left to me but the lie that I have told."

He was like the poor Judas on the tympanum. Gale could not bear to look at him. He turned back to the Beattus manuscript. There was a charm about these naïve, brightly coloured pictures. They expressed a primitive joy in life and death, an impartial delight in heavenly blessedness and fiery eternal damnation that to Gale was like a way of escape. He said lazily:

"Perhaps I might help you, Father. I am no scholar and I have nothing on God's earth to live for."

"You have the child."

Gale looked up in sheer astonishment. It was ridiculous. He wanted to laugh—to say something brutal. But Pepe sat on the floor opposite him. His arms were folded about his knees and he looked at Gale. The brown, beady eyes were very intent. They seemed to be trying earnestly not to blink—perhaps not to flinch. And now that there was no laughter in the puckered young face, Gale saw that underneath there had always been this look of unconscious sorrow. And there flashed into his mind the cock crowing reproachfully on its stone arch.

"Yes," he said. "It seems that Pepe and I belong together. Well, what if the two of us should help you, Father—if you trust us?"

"I do trust you, señor."

"And Pepe here—I promise you he will not criticize your Latin."

The priest regarded the child with a grave smile.

"I know that a Spanish beggar is a gentleman," he said, "and can keep silence. But I cannot involve you further in the hatred that I have brought down upon myself. You have enough to face."

"Believe me, Father, popularity does not mean much to either of us."

"Perhaps not. But you cannot live here in the teeth of the people's anger. My office still protects me. Nothing protects you. That is why I have asked you to come to see me. The people are talking. They say that you are going to live with this woman."

"And for once rumour speaks truly, Father. I am going to live with her. I regret that it must be without the blessing of the Church."

"Do not mock me. I warn you that there are things the people will not tolerate. They distrust you deeply. They ask what brings you here—to this harsh country——"

"Just that, Father," Gale interposed. "The harshness. You can tell them so."

"You have your own grief, señor. You solve it in your own way. I do not understand. They would understand still less. But I tell you—theirs is a dark, dangerous temper. I am a renegade and you are a heretic consorting with an evil woman. If any disaster should befall the village——"

"The water stinks," Gale interposed. "With any luck we should all be dead of typhoid within a month—if you count that as a disaster."

"The people do not concern themselves with typhoid, but with God's anger."

"We must take our chance," Gale murmured indifferently.

"Señor, I have warned you."

"And I am grateful. You mean well. Pepe and I will be delighted in our spare time to lend you our unskilled, disinterested assistance. And if so required will accompany you to the stake. Isn't that so, Pepe?"

The child regarded him with a grave contentment.

"I have never wished to be a martyr," he admitted. "I do not think that martyrs look happy people. But if you desire it of me, señor, I will be a martyr with you, señor."

"You see, he is a faithful soul, Father."

Overhead the bells began to stir uneasily. They muttered

among themselves. And presently like an awkward village choir that has at last made its selection they broke into clear, rough singing. The priest rose to his feet.

"Vespers," he sighed.

He opened the door and the three of them went back into the church. It was already alive with darkly moving worshippers who, as the priest came into the altar lights, stood motionless and watchful. A little close-shorn boy in a dirty cotta ran up and down the steps with a taper, and one by one the long candles were tipped with stars. They clustered about the Virgin's feet and she looked down at them and beyond them at the priest who knelt and crossed himself. Gale saw how she triumphed over him in her serene silence. The priest's face, lifted to hers, was distraught and bitter and defeated.

"I have given her everything I could," he said. "I have kept my vows. I have fasted. I have gone without kin and the love of women. She should be satisfied."

"Women are not easily satisfied," Gale retorted. He felt angry and ashamed of his own levity. But he could not help himself. He touched the dark kneeling figure lightly on the shoulder. "Beattus is worth the lot of them," he said.

He knew that the hostile eyes followed him as he strode down the central aisle. He felt how Pepe drew closer to him, holding his head defiantly with a child's dread of hatred. He had a moment of profound pity. But he knew that no act of his could shake this faithfulness. He had fed Pepe. And so Pepe, like Leah, belonged to him to suffer as he chose.

The sun blazed down on the little platform outside the church. The heat was like a blast from a furnace. It seared the flesh. The dust seemed to be white with heat. A few villagers were straggling up the steps through the archway. As Gale passed them they drew back farther against the wall. He heard their indistinguishable whisper. A stone struck him smartly on the shoulder, but he did not turn.

"Who was it, Pepe?"

"Vicente, señor."

Gale laughed to himself.

"One day when we feel so disposed we will go back and wring Vicente's neck," he said.

3

Gale worried about Leah. Leah had disappeared. Even Pepe seemed anxious—rather superstitiously anxious, as though he felt that if Leah vanished he might vanish himself. So before they went down to the plain and in spite of the great heat they made a search of the village, poking into dark doorways and close, foul-smelling alleys, till they came to the dying stream behind the cemetery and, exhausted, lay down in the shade of a broken wall to rest. Pepe fetched water in the palms of his brown hands. The water tasted thick and feverish, and the hands were not very clean. But Gale drank from them and wondered at the happiness in the small face close to his own. There was something quite beautiful about Pepe at that moment—something tender and compassionate as though, after all, he were the elder and the stronger of the two.

Gale didn't know why he worried about Leah. It was very beautiful where he lay. But the beauty was terrible and dead and so remote from human feeling that it was difficult to believe in life at all. The mountains were like brass under the unclouded sunlight. The thin grass and straggling vines had been burned up and the strange earth stripped naked. Nothing moved except the shadows in the clefts of the mountains and in the deep hollows of the frozen red sea. Even Balthazar's lean herd of cattle that had come down the foothills to the edge of the sluggish river had been caught in the deathlike immobility. There was no sound. And the silence, too, had a brazen, metallic quality that beat heavily on the

senses. It was as though the sun were a huge brass gong sending down rays of hot inaudible sound.

At Whiteladies there was always something homely and familiar to listen to. The very clouds seemed to make a soft gliding whisper, like the pretty sound of a woman's skirts, as they hurried lightly overhead. Even in midsummer the birds kept up a faint singing as though they couldn't stop talking about their happiness. Or there was the grass and the indecipherable murmur of life, never far distant. The wind brought it to you, even on the loneliest reaches of the downs. (There was almost always a wind at Whiteladies, sometimes lusty and rough, like a gorgeously drunken sailor, and tasting of the sea, and sometimes lighter and gentler than a child's breath. Only at sunset was there a real silence. But even then it was different—human and gentle and meditative.)

Gale supposed that he worried about Leah because she reminded him of his own dogs. He had always had a dog to follow him. Even in the little house in Half Moon Street they had had Poogles, the obstinate and reticent Aberdeen whose faintest show of regard they had welcomed with abject gratitude. In some of the worst moments of their lives Poogles had acted as a sort of rallying point for the disorganized and beaten forces of Gale and Justine's love for each other.

This place was like limbo, Gale thought—a sheer emptiness. If you kept very still you could almost achieve emptiness yourself. But you had to be careful or you might slip and slide back, say into your old chambers at the Albany. And then things came to life with a vengeance—hurt like a red-hot iron thrust into your vitals so that you felt you'd have to jump up and run and run, just to escape.

"May I draw pictures, señor?"

Gale pulled out a bundle of letters from his pocket—all sorts of business letters that had followed him even here and were for the most part of an indignant nature. He selected one of them and gave the unwritten side to Pepe with a pencil.

"You can make a portrait of me, if you like," he said.

"Then you must sit still, señor."

Gale turned over the letters. One from Powell. It wasn't exactly a legal letter. It had a quality of piteousness that made Gale angry every time he thought of it. Why couldn't the fellow have kept to business? All this talk—— What did the little misshapen sentimentalist know about the relationship of men and women? He had bought his own woman and she had died of the bargain. The thought of Margaret in his arms made one quite sick. And yet Gale had turned to him instinctively—perhaps out of a sort of beastly fellow feeling. There were some kinds of deformity that were revolting, that made men outcasts from their kind.

Gale knew that he was hurting himself in order to feel real again. Otherwise one might end by going mad like Don Cristóbal and that wretched priest. Pepe was happy anyway—immensely intent and studying Gale with an impersonal gravity that made Gale laugh. The child had a sort of genius for quiet. He rarely talked. But he was always listening—even when Gale was silent. And he could draw too—with the naïve inspiration of the primitives who were his only masters. Nothing could come of it. He would be frustrated and beaten into craziness like the priest Valeza with his sick love for knowledge and rare, beautiful things. Pepe was like a young tree that could never grow up in this thin, harsh soil.

"What will become of you, Pepe?"

The child stopped for a moment with his pencil to his lips.

"I don't know, señor." But his eyes twinkled confidingly as though he added to himself, "That is your affair." And Gale, who understood the twinkle, persisted with an unreasonable roughness:

"I mean, what will you do when I am gone?"

"You said you would never go."

"Well, I might die."

Pepe began to draw again. He was brave, but death was

something he couldn't face any more. It overwhelmed his childishness with a new power. Gale could see the small breast lift with anguish and was ashamed.

"There, don't be a donkey. I'm not going to die. But if you are to become a great artist you will have to go away from here yourself. I shall be left alone."

"I shouldn't leave you, señor. You haven't anyone but me and Leah, have you?"

"And Chiquita," Gale added.

Pepe did not answer. He wouldn't accept Chiquita until he had to.

"I have no one either," he said.

Gale had never bothered about Pepe's antecedents. It would have been as useless as trying to trace Leah's father and mother. They were both strays. And anyhow he didn't care. But he wished Leah would turn up, snuffling round the cemetery wall in search of him. Even though she would not let him touch her there was something companionable and comforting in the way she would lie with her nose between her paws and her pale eyes on his face. If anybody had told him that he would worry about such an object, he would have laughed. But then his whole life had become fantastic. Perhaps he was a little mad already. Other men would have carried on—gone about their business as though nothing had happened. After all, he had money enough. He could have put up a good show, caused a certain amount of havoc one way and another, which might have amused and kept him sane. No one could have possibly suspected. He knew that he was a fine-looking animal. *"Un cabestro grande."* That was one of the pretty things he had called himself when the force of life in him had risen to the height of its frustration. He had said it to Justine that night they came home from Nat's party. Gale had been rather drunk and quite frantic. *"Traer á alguno de cabestro"* he had added in wicked jesting. He could see Justine's face now—its perplexity—its tormented pity.

That was four years after they came back from Cornwall. It wasn't the sort of thing that could happen suddenly to decent people. It had to be led up to by minute acts of self-torture and exaggerated offence. And of course Cornwall had been a holiday—a flight from life. They had been crazy to think it could last. Perhaps they hadn't thought it—only pretended. Even in the train on the way up to London, Gale had been aware of a darkening over their mood. They had smiled at one another, but pitifully like people trying to give each other courage. Well, courage was all right for a single act of endurance. But for life you had to have something more. Love itself wasn't enough. For Gale and Justine had loved each other. Even now he couldn't deny that to himself.

They had been so elaborately cautious. They had settled down to such a normal, reasonable life, balancing one activity against another, like physicians drawing up a diet for a sick patient, so that their minds and bodies shouldn't have a chance to get morbid. Justine, who didn't care much for domesticity, ran the little house in Half Moon Street as though her life depended on keeping everything smooth and comfortable—as though they couldn't afford the faintest breath of trouble. They had charming dinners and people got into the habit of dropping in afterward. They liked the Braddyls, who were so gay and good-looking and in love with each other and yet who seemed so almost excitedly glad to welcome them. Sometimes Baise would spend the week-end in the pretty spare room, and sometimes Claire or Jane—but there was always somebody. In some things Gale was either shrewder or more honest than Justine. He had said once, "We don't dare to be alone." That was one of their first admissions of defeat. It had made a breach in their elaborate defence. Afterward the enemy broke in more and more easily until he couldn't be kept out at all and was accepted like a hated conqueror in the very heart of the citadel.

Every morning Gale went to work in the new firm of engineers in which he had bought himself a partnership. He hated it, but he knew that he couldn't have gone on without it. It steadied him to be accepted willingly and even admiringly by other men. For he knew how they saw him. To them Gale Braddyl was a fine fellow. He had done well in the War; he had money; he played polo; he was happily married. And with all that he was generous and likable. They forgave him his unaccountable bursts of ill-temper and they never grudged him his luck. In a way they were glad of it. He reassured them as to the possibilities of life. They, on their side, helped him to keep the façade intact. There were moments, in their company, when Gale himself came to believe in his luck and was almost happy.

At first Justine used to meet him for lunch at a little restaurant off Fleet Street. Such jolly little lunches. Before the end they became constrained and difficult. But one day, after a minor quarrel, she didn't come and it seemed to him that the bottom had dropped out of his life. He waited an hour for her, frantic with anxiety and anger. Later on she dropped in at the office. She was utterly repentant. It was all her fault. And with tears and laughter and a total disregard for the solemnity of their surroundings they made it up. But after that the habit was never reëstablished. She came less and less often. In a way he didn't want her to come. But it hurt him all the same, and he never spoke of it. His galled pride expressed itself in outbursts of irritability—in sarcastic references to the men who had begun to dance attendance on her. His attacks were ill-natured and ill-bred. But that was what their life together began to do to him. It reduced him to the level of a vulgar, nagging cad.

There were, indeed, long intervals of peace and sometimes—absurdly—of happiness. At such times they would look at

each other incredulously as though they couldn't make out what had ever been the matter. It seemed impossible to believe that things could ever go wrong again. There was one particular occasion. They had gone to Paris for Easter. Perhaps they had been too determined to be happy. At least they attained nothing but an expensive wretchedness. They danced late every night, wandering from one night-haunt to another in a baffled search for satiety. By day they drove and rode and shopped until they were a tangle of frayed, exasperated nerves. Gale knew that they came near hating each other. Then on the last morning—it was a Sunday and the streets were swept clean and bright by spring sunshine and a light-hearted Parisian wind—they went in search of an artist friend of Gale's and after wandering unsuccessfully up many side streets on the *rive gauche* they came to an old house and a decayed garden with a rough statue of a dancing faun rising out of a wilderness of weeds. And beyond the garden they found a steep, narrow staircase, full of dust and silence, and at the top a window across which lay the single branch of a plane tree. That was all. But they stood still, looking up into the sunlight like astonished children. There was magic in that branch. It seemed to express some deep loveliness, some state of happiness that Gale had forgotten. It was like breaking through a cloud into clear space, into a new world of experience. And yet not altogether new. Gale had been there before. But he had lost the way. He would never lose it again. He turned silently. There were tears in Justine's eyes—and in his own. They kissed each other, deeply, tenderly. It was all right now. They had found something which they would never forget.

But they had forgotten. By sunset. Or if Gale remembered it, as he did now, it was no more than the fragment of a dream, poignant with a dream's unearthly beauty but by daylight confused and meaningless.

"You must keep still, señor."

"How can one keep still, my young tyrant, when one is in pain?"

"Are you in pain, señor?"

"I am hurting myself all over."

"Why do you do that?"

"It amuses me. Besides, it's good for the liver."

"You wouldn't let anyone hurt Leah or me——"

"That's different. That wouldn't be amusing. And where the hell is Leah, anyway?"

Pepe narrowed his brown eyes.

"I heard Vicente say that one day he would kill the brute."

"He wouldn't do that. He knows what I would do to him. He is a coward."

"You are wrong, señor. Vicente is not a coward. At the last *tiente* at Tuella he distinguished himself greatly. The Duke said that he would take him to Madrid one day."

"A bullfighter is a coward," Gale said.

He turned away from Pepe's reception of this blasphemy, back to his own life.

At week-ends they had always "done something." They motored down into the country or in the season Gale played polo at Ranelagh. Once at Ranelagh he had found happiness. A splendid happiness. At the end of a bitterly fought chukker Gale had made the decisive goal. It was a bit of luck perhaps, but at least for a moment he had ridden gorgeously on the very crest of life. And afterward, streaming with perspiration, laughing, exultant, purified by a sense of physical virtue, he had dismounted and walked over to Justine. How brave and lovely she had looked against that Arcadian background! She had waited for him. And as he came close to her he saw her eyes. In them he recognized a realization of what they might have been to each other—a memory of that profound exultant union which they had lost. She had turned quickly

away, hiding from him. But he had seen. And his manhood had been stripped from him.

She wasn't happy. She was suffering. It wasn't to be wondered at if she became ruthless. And he tormented her. Sometimes he tormented her deliberately and could not stop himself. He tried to make up for it. He remembered how one morning he had sent her flowers and a little note written in haste and confusion at the florists. It was impossible to say what he wanted to say with the attendant's interested eye on his distress. As it happened it didn't matter, because that night when he came home he found the letter unopened and the flowers wilting in their half-opened box. Nothing could have been more eloquent. He could almost see the gesture of disgust and more than justified impatience with which she had pushed the flowers aside. And she had gone out without a word—anywhere—as though for the time at least he had become intolerable to her.

It wasn't that they hadn't tried—both of them. One winter's night with the fog wrapping them round in silence they had sat together by the fire and talked. It had been a desperate, pathetic sort of talk, like that of people on the verge of a long absolute separation who are trying to build a bridge of understanding that will endure. It was as though they admitted that the time was coming when they wouldn't be able to talk any more, and that at least each of them must take into his loneliness some vital thing by which to live. Gale remembered thinking that if only a child had come to them from that solitary act of union they would have been safe. It would have stood between them as a testimony. The thought of his own flesh re-created in perfection had filled him with such passionate longing that for a moment nothing else had mattered. He had even said to himself that if Justine had died in giving birth their relation to each other and to life would

have been preserved—one of those hideous half-truths that a man crowds from his mind in haste and shame.

"Gale, we can't go on like this. We're becoming hateful. We say things just to be cruel to each other."

"We don't mean them."

"No, it's like hitting out when one's in agony. But we hurt just the same."

"We wouldn't do it if we didn't care."

"I know, it's hideous. If that's all love is—just cruelty——"

"We know better than that."

"Oh, my dear, my dear, what has happened? What has become of us? I feel I'll have to go away, that it isn't decent."

"If you left me I don't know what I'd do."

"No—no—I won't."

"If you left me for anyone else I'd—I'd do something crazy. Sometimes I lie awake and imagine—you and some other man—together—as you and I—were——"

"You mustn't think like that."

"I can't help it. Sometimes it seems inevitable. It isn't that I'm altogether mean and selfish. But there are just some things—well, one can't endure them. That's all there is to it. Like a shirt of fire, you know. It would be like that."

"Don't, dear, don't——"

He had beaten his breast with his hand in a strange unaccustomed excitability.

"You've got to remember—just because this beastly, ghastly thing has happened to me—I haven't changed. I'm the same man. You've come to think of me as someone different—an outsider to life. But I'm not. You've got to imagine what it's like——"

"I daren't. Don't you see I can't. I mustn't—if I'm to keep going. It's like everything else; if we began to imagine—all the people who are suffering—the heart-broken people—we'd go mad. We'd have to kill ourselves. We have to pretend—everything's all right——"

He had come sharply to his burning preoccupation.

"It's the other men—they want you—they just wait—like ravenous beasts."

"Gale, it isn't true. Besides, what does it matter—what they want? Isn't it what I want?"

"Well, what do you want? If I knew that——"

"It isn't so easy. Gale, don't you realize that I'm human too, that I've got my own problem? And your jealousy, your distrust, is the one thing more that I can't bear."

"I know. It's beastly. But if you were in my place——"

"I am—perhaps I am—in my own way."

Her own way. It was then that he had spoken of their children. He had taken it for granted that there lay her fundamental grief. Women and children. It was in the tradition that he should blunder.

"Perhaps it isn't natural to live without someone young—and—and growing up," he had stammered. "Perhaps any child would help us."

Her look remained stamped on his inner vision. It had become desperate. It was as though she had been a long way off—in terrible need—and had signalled to him, and he had misunderstood and had turned away and left her. And her sense of humour had got the better of her. There had been wild, ironic laughter behind that despair. And suddenly it had grown clear to him. He had sat very still, looking into the fire.

"No, that's not the truth. We're man and wife, Justine. We're in love. We want each other. And—and that's what's killing us."

She had stood up. He had felt her just behind him with her hand on his chair. She had wanted to touch him—draw him close to her with that fierce compassion which time and time again had saved them. But they had learned its ultimate futility. They had become ashamed of it. And they had nothing left. Her hand had dropped, and she had turned away in silence.

"Look, señor. Tell me what is wrong."

Gale took the sketch. He was ashamed of his trembling. He said lightly:

"There's nothing wrong—except that you haven't made me good looking enough. Try again, my son."

"Then give me another sheet of paper, señor. I will draw you as a soldier going into battle."

"Make an heroic figure of me, Pepe."

The boy nodded gravely.

"You shall have killed all of your enemies, señor."

He had always had a contempt for those desperate criminals who wipe out themselves and the women they have lost. But perhaps, after all, they acted out of an instinctive virtue—an intuitive sense of fitness. When a man and a woman have belonged to each other—as Gale and Justine had done—and life comes between them, they are no longer fit to live. A rot sets in so that in spite of themselves they become ignoble. If that night he had made an end of them both they would have been spared intolerable memories of themselves—the violation of their most vital decencies. They would have died in pity and understanding. For at that time Nat hadn't come between them. The wound had not become gangrenous.

She met Nat three weeks later at the Chelsea Arts Ball. It was not a chance meeting. The frustrated forces in her had reached out for him, and he, waiting patiently on the confines of her life, had answered. At the time Gale hadn't known. But it had been a hideous business all the same. A *Walpurgisnacht* ending in complete moral disaster.

"And did you really kill people, señor?"

"Certainly I did. Delightful people, I am sure. Nice fellows I should have enjoyed a day's hunting with. I did extraordinary things, ungentlemanly things, Pepe. You know the Powers that Be should really think twice before they make

people like myself turn such somersaults. They should throw open their prisons and their lunatic asylums—or they should educate us from the start to be criminals and lunatics. You see—it's difficult to get straight again afterward—to be decent —gentlemanly——"

Pepe wasn't interested.

"How did you kill them, señor?"

"Oh, any way that came easiest at the moment. Sometimes I shot them, sometimes I ran them through with a bayonet—one I strangled."

"The paper is too small," Pepe complained. "I can't get it all in."

"Well, it was a big war," Gale said. "You must be content to do a little of it at a time."

After her own fashion she had been very beautiful that night. She had chosen to go as a court lady of the Roi Soleil, and the powdered wig accentuated the dark eyes and the black, finely marked brows. Her tall, slender body with its subtly implied strength added piquancy to the rigid conventional dress. She seemed to combine in herself conflicting and disturbing forces.

Her choice of costume had exasperated Gale. He sensed behind its reticent highly stylized lines a perverse passion, a sensuous joy of life more deadly than the shallow extravagance and abandonment of other women who half naked and half drunk galloped senselessly through the chaos of noise and colour. By contrast they had seemed innocent. She never lost her poise. But the expression of her eyes—a curious veiled look—and the enigmatic lines of her mouth, seemed to him unholy. He danced with her once. (He had come dressed as her court fool with cap and bells—a crude jest, a stupid brutal lampooning of their relationship which was like vinegar in a wound.) He danced detestably with her, holding her close to him and laughing until she wrenched herself free,

disgusted, hating him, but not as he hated and loathed himself. He stood back from her. It was one of the terrible things between them that in times of utmost bitterness they misused their knowledge—they perverted and twisted the confessions that only their faith in each other had made possible.

"You need a man," he said. "Go and find one, then. There are plenty waiting."

And almost at once he had left the place. With his overcoat barely covering his grotesque disguise, he had started back on foot. By this time it was almost daybreak. The streets were empty and swept by a thin, dismal rain. There was no sound but the occasional rumble of a lorry on its way to Covent Garden and the soft jingle of his own bells. When he came at last to his house the light was breaking. He did not go in at once. He stood with his hand on the railings, looking up at the windows. He was utterly beaten. He was like a beggared wanderer who has come back to find the blinds of his home drawn down and all his people dead.

"And by the way, who was your father, Pepe?"

Pepe shook his head.

"Who knows?" he asked back in utmost simplicity.

"Well, then, your mother?"

"Her name was Anna, señor."

Gale stood up. The shadows on the ravines were spreading over the Navarre mountains. They were rising to the highest peaks. But the Pyrenees had become luminous. They gleamed coldly against the clear northern horizon. There must have been some strange quality in Gale's voice, for the boy looked up at him wonderingly.

"The sun is almost down, Pepe. We must find Leah and go home."

VI

1

She was making the old tumble-down place beautiful for him. Baise couldn't help her much, he could only stand about and answer questions and move things. Yes, he thought the Welsh dresser would look splendid opposite the windows, where the light could play on its lovely silken surface. Claire made him run his hand over the wood, and he could feel its brown warmth glide through his fingers. And then Claire, who was so shy, so reticent, put his hand to her cheek and held it there in a mute tenderness.

Baise was deeply moved. He felt that there was something contrite and pleading about her love for him, and that she was asking him to forgive her. He didn't know what there was to forgive. But he did know, queerly and deeply, as he had never done before, that love, generally speaking, was a pathetic business. People meant so well, they were often so heroic and generous and faithful. And yet they made such a mess of things. They didn't seem able to make each other happy.

Baise tried to make Claire happy. He thought of nothing else. He showed her how happy he was himself. He was pleased with all her arrangements and admired the soft, delicate colours that he could feel growing around him like timid flowers in a lady's garden. In the evening, when it was too dark to work in the house, they would go for long walks together. Very often they took Peterkins with them. Or they

would talk about Peterkins, who was going to a preparatory school in the autumn. It was Baise's old school and so he could tell a lot of funny stories about it and reassure Claire as to its manifold virtues. And all this was strange. Because in the old days he had talked about his love for her.

Everybody who came to the farmhouse marvelled at the changes Claire had brought to its drab unloveliness. Piece by piece she had moved the furniture from her own cottage, replacing Baise's mid-Victorian atrocities with fragile Chippendale. She loved her possessions, and in a little while she would come herself and live among them again. Baise could feel the very atmosphere changing. She was building her own world round him; she was like some light-winged timid bird gathering straw and feathers in which to nest this alien mate of hers. And yet, though they were so different and had become so strange to one another, there was an emotional intimacy between them. It was the intimacy that runs like a naked nerve between people who have been embedded in each other's consciousness for the best part of their lives. Each knew that the other was unhappy.

No, it wasn't exactly unhappiness. Because when Claire put his hand to her cheek Baise had felt as though all the nameless distress within himself had been resolved. He touched a brief, absolute equilibrium. He was at peace. It was only the thought of their marriage that raised this unrest. Well, thank God, one day he would be an old man and all these contrary winds and tides would be laid forever and he would be able to see where he was going and what it was all about.

He helped Claire move the dresser to a new position. If he couldn't see, he could obey orders accurately.

"I think it's better there," Claire said. "It will be well away from the door."

"Yes, that's right."

"Oh, and I forgot to tell you. Jane and Mother came home yesterday evening. Quite unexpectedly. Mother telephoned.

Jane hasn't been well. They think she's been doing too much."

He felt suddenly that she was watching him.

"Well, I suppose London went to her head a bit," he said. "Is that quite straight, dear?"

"Quite. Thank you, Baise. You're wonderful. Yes, I don't know how she stood it so long. Out late every night and something doing all day long—as though she were in a fever—— Just youth. When I was Jane's age I couldn't sit still, either."

"Oh, I know. She's just a child. Children never get really tired. Not inside—like we do. I think it's more than that. She's worried about something. Mother hinted as much. You know, Frank Carstans is in love with her."

"No, I didn't know that."

"Perhaps she's frightened."

He smiled faintly toward her.

"You're not frightened any more, are you?"

"No, it's different now. Baise, you're different."

"Yes, I expect it's that. I was a rude, rough fellow."

"You—you don't miss being rude and rough, do you?"

He laughed at her wistfulness.

"God knows I don't. It was a beastly nuisance to everyone." He fished his pipe out of his pocket. "Anything more I can do? Or may I go out and have a smoke?"

"I wish you would. It's lovely outside. And I've tired you—I forget you've had such a long day behind you. Don't walk back with me to-night."

"You know I will," he said.

The warm summer twilight rested on him like a quieting hand. He felt that he had managed rather well. But for a moment he had been frightened. Even now he didn't understand what had happened. It had been terrible—as though a thin crust that divided the known side of himself from the unknown had been broken through by an amazing force of pain and anger. He was still trembling with it—Jane and

Frank Carstans. Baby Jane. She had said that she wasn't Baby Jane any more. She was a grown woman. Well, of course. What did he expect? Couldn't he grow up himself? When he was a young man and Claire had married Peter he had felt like this—so frantic with sheer physical anguish that he had had to take to the wilderness and incredible hardship for safety. He'd got over it. He'd come to the point where he had been able to think of all Peterkins represented and actually love him. Now if it were to begin all over again—if he were to find out that he had learned nothing—overcome nothing—merely attained indifference—— And Jane anyhow—— What had she got to do with him? Perhaps all men felt like that about their womenfolk—a sort of caveman's possessiveness. Why, he must be quite mad.

He pushed open the gate. Someone was coming down the hill path. His ears were sharp to catch the faintest footfall. Jane was at Whiteladies. She would walk over—to find Claire. They would take Claire home and then—then when they were alone he would ask her about Frank Carstans—teasingly, lightly, like the brother he really was. He had to know. Then he could adjust himself. After all, they were friends, too. Perhaps he could help her.

"Jane?" he asked. There was secrecy in his voice. He didn't want Claire to come running out—not yet—not till he had got a hold over himself. He could have laughed when he heard the answer. It served him right. It was Alfred Powell's high, cackling voice.

"So glad to find you at home, Lindesfarne. Just walked over on the chance—*et pour me promener.* May I speak to you a moment?"

"Of course. Come in. Claire's here."

"I'd rather not. It's getting late. And I'm a slow walker. *Un petit moment seulement.* You know—I'm starting for Spain to-morrow."

"No, I didn't know that."

"I meant to go before. But my illness—— And I felt I had to get my book—Margaret's book—finished before I went—in case anything happened."

Baise knew that the little man was mopping himself. There was something very tired about the absurd voice.

"Nothing serious, I hope?"

"No, not serious. Just heart, you know. A few months perhaps—— Please don't say anything about it. It's of no importance to anyone but myself, and I'm glad. I've nothing left to live for here. And that's the time to go, isn't it?"

"Yes," Baise said gently. "I suppose it is."

"I knew you'd understand. It's terrible to be sympathized with for the wrong things. You've been through so much yourself. You don't set such a store on life——"

"It's a game we are made to play without anyone telling us the rules until it's too late," Baise said out of his own bafflement. "But it comes to an end just the same—and the one thing we do know about it is that we can't win."

"No, I wouldn't say that, Lindesfarne. I wouldn't say that. You may laugh, but I haven't done so badly. I don't feel beaten. You see—I've had Margaret. We were such great friends. In some ways my life has been very wonderful—very surprising. I think I know some things that perhaps—more fortunate men don't know——"

It was a queer conversation, Baise thought. It seemed to have broken over his head from nowhere. Powell himself seemed to feel the queerness. He apologized.

"But I didn't come to talk about myself. I'm going to see Gale. There's just one thing I want—I want Gale and Justine to be happy."

"We all want that," Baise said. "But we can't do anything. They've just got to find happiness for themselves."

"They'll never find it alone."

Baise smiled grimly.

"I don't suppose they'll try."

"I meant—apart from each other."

"Oh, I know how you feel," Baise said. "It was a great romance. But it's gone on the rocks, and we can't get it off. Let them alone, Powell. You can't help them."

"But perhaps I can, out of this special knowledge of mine. I have suffered myself and found peace. If I could only make them understand——"

"You'd have to understand them first," Baise interrupted, "and that you never can."

"Then there is something—I felt that you knew more than the rest of us—that you might give me the key——"

Baise was silent. He had a vision of this absurd creature flying into the tangle of Gale and Justine's tragedy—getting himself tied up in it like a puppy in a ball of worsted. He would make everything unbearable and ridiculous.

"Just leave them alone, Powell," he said at last. "It's the kindest thing you can do."

"You won't help me then?"

"I can't. It's not my affair."

He heard a rough, uneven sigh—a sort of asthmatic wheeze.

"Well, everything and nothing is my affair now. *Bon soir,* Monsieur Baise."

"You're tired. Won't you let me drive you home?"

"No, thank you all the same. I like to walk. It's very beautiful across the fields to-night. Give my love to Claire. Good-bye——" Gale heard him start off and then retrace his steps. He felt something tentative, eager, reach out toward him. He held out his hand and it was taken in a moist, hot clasp. "I've told them to send you my book—Margaret's book—in case anything happened. Good-bye, good-bye."

Claire came out presently.

"I waited," she said. "It wasn't very kind of me. But he's such a distressing little fellow."

"He's going to die," Baise said.

Her hand flew to his arm. He had never felt such strength in her. It was as though she were holding him fast against some fierce outgoing tide.

"Baise, how terrible!"

"He doesn't think so."

"No—it's all right for him. But death——"

"Why, you're not frightened, sweetheart!"

"Yes—a little—I was thinking—if one lost anyone——"

She was thinking of him. She who had held out so long and so stubbornly cared so much. It shook him to the heart.

"He's sending us his book—Margaret's book."

"That was kind of him."

"I wonder what it will be like."

"I think it will be very beautiful," she said.

They stood together for a long time in silence. Then she raised herself, sighing faintly.

"You won't die—will you, Baise?"

"Never. I promise—sacred word of honour."

"Don't laugh. I meant—not till I've made you happy."

"Not till I've made you happy," he returned gravely.

Her cheek brushed against his sleeve.

"Walk home with me."

"Of course. Where's Peterkins?"

"He's gone. I sent him back. I wanted us to be alone."

"I'm glad. I adore Peterkins. But we ought to be alone—sometimes."

"Yes, when we're alone everything will be all right."

So it wasn't all right. Not quite. They both knew it. He held open the gate for her.

"And afterward—when you've left me—you might go over and see Mother and Jane—and have a chat."

"Not to-night. I'm too tired——"

But his pulses had broken into a thick hard beating. And he knew that he had lied to her.

2

The road to Whiteladies from Claire's cottage ran down into Collen Deep and up again to the crest of the hill. Within a hundred yards of Claire's gate a field path turned to the right. When Baise came to it he would have decided. He hardly knew what it was he had to decide. The struggle was going on somewhere beneath his immediate consciousness. He was like a man waiting for news of a distant battle.

He walked very slowly—rather carefully. He wasn't so sure of himself. Although the sun was still above the horizon it was almost night under the overhanging trees. He could taste the darkness. It tasted damp and cold. The withered leaves rustled under his feet. They made it difficult for him to keep track of the road. In a few weeks the fiery awakening from the heavy torpor of summer would have begun. And Claire would be his wife.

Baise wondered about next year. What would have happened to them all? Because something had to happen. In a way it was a consolation to know that however bewildered you were life wouldn't wait for you. It went on, sweeping you with it. But what could happen? At the moment nothing seemed possible. But then he was very tired. Oddly discouraged. It was on account of his tiredness that he had said good-night to Claire at her gate. She had been so wistfully anxious. Perhaps she had known. It was rather awful the way people knew about each other. If only they knew more——

It was this wretched half-knowledge—this almost animal flair for each other's emotions without understanding their source. But then one didn't understand one's self.

He was at the turn of the path. He could feel where the grass at the side of the road had been worn away. Now he had decided. Really there had been nothing to decide. He was going home. Of course. He had told Claire so. But it was like a sort of paralysis—a web of enchantment woven about

his will. He didn't seem able to move, but stood there listening to the silence, his face turned to the road. The sweat gathered about his mouth. He heard himself groan faintly. One movement and it would be over. He would be free. But it was that first decisive movement that he couldn't make. He was being held——

Then, suddenly, he knew. She was there. Like a white moth in the dusk. He knew that she was dressed in white. The whiteness beat against him in a warm, clear radiance. She had been there all the time, watching him. He was confounded, for he knew that she had seen everything that he had kept hidden from himself. But at last the struggle was over. He relaxed, sighing with physical relief.

She knew then that he was aware of her.

"I was coming over to Claire," she said. "I saw you and I waited. I wanted to see what you would do."

"What did you expect me to do?" he asked.

"Never mind. You look tired. Are you tired, Unky Baise?"

"I'm all right. How about yourself? Claire said you weren't very fit."

"Did she? I wish she wouldn't talk such rot. There's nothing the matter. I'm just sick of things."

"Too much of them, eh?"

"Much too much. I couldn't stick them any more."

"Poor old girl."

"Oh, don't fuss. I'm all right now. Just being back here—home——"

"It's grand to have you back."

"I'm sure it is. Good for you, Unky Baise. Always ready to say the pretty things."

She was angry for some reason—so angry that she wanted to hurt him. But he didn't care. He knew that she was unhappy. He dug his hands into his coat pockets. They hadn't touched each other. They were like friends who had quarrelled.

"I'll walk back with you to Claire's."

"Thanks. The younger sister comes in useful sometimes. You were going home, weren't you?"

"To the farm—yes."

"You weren't coming to see me?"

"I was dead tired."

"So Claire sent you back——"

He laughed with a faint exasperation. She was being rather beastly. He was angry and glad, too.

"I was trying to send myself."

"All right. You don't need to rub it in——"

"You saw me trying——"

"—or make rotten excuses," she muttered.

He was silent under her bitterness. He heard her move. She was turning away.

"Aren't you going to Claire's?"

"No, I'm not. I don't feel like it any more."

"Then I'll go along with you—to the house. But I won't come in."

"Don't worry. I shan't make you."

Usually she took his arm. To-night she left him to blunder along as best he could. But he had such a sharp awareness of her that he could keep close without touching her. He knew that inwardly she was trembling and that if he touched her she would break down.

"How's Justine?"

"Having a great time. You wouldn't think she'd ever cared about anything. Perhaps she didn't."

"Justine cared, all right."

"I dare say. Anyway, she's got over it."

"You're rather hard on her, Jane."

"I'm not. Only I won't be sentimental. Justine's had things. Nobody can take that from her."

"Has she heard from Wynne?"

"They've got to wait. Some frontier fight or other. I wish they'd kill him."

"What good would that do?"

"I don't know. I'm just feeling vicious. Besides, you're so damn reasonable. He's always meant to get Justine. And now he's got her."

"Well, I suppose Justine wants him, too. She has a right to happiness."

"Who told you that? Has she any more right than you or I?"

"I didn't say so. We are going to be happy, aren't we?"

"You are."

"What's the matter, Jane?"

"Oh, shut up."

"You're crying."

"I wish to God you weren't blind. Then you wouldn't be able to see in the dark."

"Listen—Jane—you know, you ought to tell me things. What's wrong?"

"Why ought I to tell you?"

"Because I care."

"Oh, I know, the perfect brotherly cousin."

"Don't——"

"I'm a devil. I'm so miserable."

"Jane, is it—someone you're in love with?"

"How did you know?"

"Claire said——"

"How like Claire to go yapping to you——"

"She didn't. It was your mother——"

"I thought I could trust Elizabeth to hold her tongue. Why can't they leave me alone? They don't know anything. If there was anything—it was up to me to tell you."

"Yes, that's what hurt."

"Were you hurt?"

"Oh—I mean—just hearing it from someone else."

"You poor donkey. What do you think you've heard?"

"That you're in love."

"That's bright of you. Every time a woman has a fit of the blues she's in love. With whom?"

"Well—Frank Carstans——"

"Good God!"

The blood roared in his ears.

"Why not? Frank's a fine fellow. And even I know he's madly in love with you."

"Well—that's true, anyway. More's the pity. What difference does that make? Are you in love with people just because they're in love with you? If you were, you'd find yourself in a pretty pickle, Unky Baise."

She began to laugh. He couldn't bear it. He had to stop her. He spoke angrily.

"Shut up yourself, Jane. You're infuriating. Why don't you tell the truth?"

"Oh, you really want the truth? What is it that the truth is supposed to do? 'The truth shall set you free.' Well, that's a lie, anyway."

He was silent. For the first time since his first blindness he was feeling giddy and sick as though he were losing his balance and might fall down. When Jane spoke again her voice had changed. It had become gentle and contrite like a child's.

"Don't be angry, Baise. I'm horrid. But I'm tired too. I ought to have kept away. Please forgive me."

"There's nothing to forgive. But whatever else we can't help, don't let's hurt each other."

"Perhaps we can help that least of all."

"I can't bear to hear you talk like that—you sound so terrifically wise. And you're so young——"

"I don't think being old has anything to do with wisdom. When one's old one's just tired. One doesn't fight any more. That's all."

"Am I tired, Jane?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Oh—I've been wondering lately—I'm so reasonable and patient——"

"Are you?"

"Not now—not now——" he could have cried out bitterly. Aloud he answered with reflective calm: "I suppose one doesn't change. Not really. I'm the same mad fellow who had to lose himself in a jungle to keep sane."

"There'll be no jungles any more."

"No—that's it—there can't be—there isn't any need for them."

"Of course—no need," she murmured.

They had reached the crest of the hill. In a few yards they would be at the gates. He felt the ground level under his feet and stopped.

"I'll go back now. No—Jane—don't—you mustn't—it's too late."

"Oh, Baise—just to the path again. I'm so alone. I've wanted to talk to you. I'll run into Claire's afterward. I'll say we met by accident."

"Well—we did——"

"Of course—of course."

They were deceiving Claire. What were they deceiving Claire about? It was ugly—what they were doing. And yet he didn't know what it was. He felt his hand against Claire's cheek. He loved her with all that was vital, that was most enduring in him.

"Baise, where's Meerut?"

"I don't know. Sounds like India. Is it? Why do you ask?"

"I've got a friend—a doctor. She's going out there to study —native diseases or something. She asked me to go with her. She said I was just the sort. I wouldn't be frightened."

"Don't be a little fool!"

"Why, am I a little fool?"

"You in all that dirt and misery——"

"Why not? Perhaps I'd get keen like she is. It must be wonderful—to be keen on something outside yourself that doesn't hurt."

"I know. I was happy like that in the War."

"I must find a war," she whispered.

Their words were becoming mere sounds on the surface of their real speech with each other. But at any moment the reality might break through. She meant it to break through because she was so reckless and young and unhappy. He had to save her.

"It'd never do, Jane—your roughing it. You weren't made for that sort of thing. You were meant for happy, lovely things. That night at the Savoy, for instance. You were happy then, weren't you?"

"Yes—I think I was. I'm not sure. It was so mixed. Yes—I was—when we were dancing that last time."

"Not the last time, Jane. Why do you talk as though—well, as though we were going to die? Haven't we got each other still? Doesn't that count for something?"

"Oh, Baise—how tired, how tired you must be!"

"No, it's not that. It's not tiredness. It's just that I'm trying to make the best of life—it's the realization that one has to compromise—that we can't find perfection——"

"That is being old—being resigned. But I'm not old. I'm only twenty-two. I've had nothing—not even the War."

"Yes, I know. But it's all in front of you. You can't believe it now, but it's true all the same, that so long as things are in front of you and not behind you, you can bear them."

"They're not in front of me."

"They are—they must be—I couldn't bear it——"

"Frank Carstans, for instance?"

"Some one—you could really care for."

He felt her brush aside his insincerity, as though it were

something shameful to them both. And yet he was doing the best he knew.

"Baise—can't we ever dance again?"

"Of course. Why not?"

"I'd like to—just once—before——"

"I'll come up—soon. I'll give another party—just like the last one."

"With Frank and Claire?"

"Well—anyone you like. It'll be your party."

"I don't want anyone. Couldn't we—just you and I—just once?"

They were at the path.

"You know we can't," he said.

So, after all, it was he who had broken through. She had driven him to it. He could feel her triumphing over his reticence, childishly and bitterly. She didn't know what she had done. For now there was nothing left—nothing more that they could ever say to each other. He turned away. He dared not let her know what had happened. He didn't know where he was. All sense of direction—that precious, exquisite sense that had been given him in return for sight—was lost. He was really blind. Like a panic-stricken horse he went straight forward, crashing his face against a tree. It was ridiculous, grotesque. It marked the climax of humiliation. The blood ran into his eyes. He had to hide it from her. But it was of no use. He heard her exclamation—its pity, its tenderness, its reckless joy in his defeat. Her arms enfolded him. In silence they melted into each other.

The world broke into laughter and splendid colour. His whole frustrated youth poured itself into that first kiss.

3

The Carlton lounge was a strange place for a strange conversation. Justine wondered about the other people at the

little tables. They looked like pieces of precious if not always beautiful china with a bright hard surface. Nothing violent could ever have happened to them. But then Justine knew that her own appearance lied flagrantly. The fact that she was saying ultimate and rather desperate things about herself didn't for a moment disturb the façade of a well-bred, well-dressed, good-looking woman-of-the-world. Probably the other people thought that she was enjoying a careless flirtation. So that you couldn't tell——

The man beside her sat with his head bent and one hand resting loosely on the table. She felt sure that it was an attitude which he assumed involuntarily when he was listening to sad, difficult confessions. It expressed with a curious poignancy a sense of a tremendous common burden. And that implied acceptance of a universality in the individual grief made him seem impersonal too, so that his pity did not hurt or intrude upon her.

At the end Justine laughed wryly.

"You have made me say all this, Dr. Elliot. But what was the use? You knew as much before. You know more than I do. I remember that day in the hospital. You said it wouldn't be easy and I almost laughed at you. You must have seen that I was incredulous. But you wouldn't laugh with me. You knew—didn't you—what must happen to us?"

"You were so young," he said. "It was bound to hit you hard. I hoped, somehow, that you would pull through."

"And we haven't. Do you think it was all my fault?"

"I don't think it was anyone's fault."

"No, you're a doctor. Doctors won't let us talk about sin—only about glands. And on the surface we accept your jargon and try to get some comfort out of it. But underneath it doesn't help us. We're sinners in spite of you."

He looked up at her with his faint and charming smile.

"You mean, children of God in spite of us," he said.

She shook her head.

"You mustn't say startling platitudes like that—at least not as though you meant them. Then they become frightening."

"They are frightening," he admitted.

"Are we just beasts?" she asked desperately.

"We're somewhere between beasts and gods," he said, "and that, I suppose, is the devil. At any rate it's the devil for us. We've attained self-consciousness. But we don't know how to use it. We're like blind people who've suddenly got their sight. We can't judge our distances. Colour just knocks us silly. By the time we've got our eye in, so to speak, we're dead."

She stirred restlessly.

"What are we to do? We want to be decent. I wanted to be decent. Was I a rotter that I couldn't go on living like that? I'm a human being. I'm young. I suppose I'm as sensual as most people. Perhaps more so. I'm strong, so—so damn full of everything. I love to ride—to feel my body expressing itself. I like to get tired and to rest and sleep and eat. But there's more to me than that—somewhere—if I could lay hold of it. Perhaps I could have gone on. But he wouldn't let me. Sometimes he was like a madman. He wouldn't let me alone. He distrusted me until I couldn't trust myself. I think sometimes he despised and loathed me because I suffered. He made me feel rotten through and through."

"He was suffering," Elliot said.

"I know, I knew then. I think he was sorry for me, too. But it didn't help us. We seemed damned to torture each other against our wills."

"He was like a poet who has been silenced," Elliot said—"like a painter who has lost his sight or a musician who has lost his hearing. He was crazy with frustration."

"And I——"

"You too."

"So there was no chance for us."

He was silent.

"There are only two kinds of happy people in the world,"

he said at last—"the people who are practically animals and who have retained the simplicity and innocence of animals, and those who have attained God. The rest of us are all terribly unhappy."

"And what is God and how does one attain to Him?" she asked with bitterness.

"I can't tell you. I don't know. But I do know that it can be done without knowing."

"Have you done it?"

He flushed. The colour that mounted to the roots of his graying hair seemed to her rather touching. It made her realize that he too had put himself at another's mercy.

"I think so. It sounds presumptuous, doesn't it? I just mean that I have attained peace."

"How have you attained it?"

"I can't even tell you that. Not through thought, not through philosophy. If I were to tell you what I know I should flounder into platitudes that would make you despise me and perhaps make me despise the fragile thing that I have won. I can only say that the attainment has been through suffering. Some of it was vicarious. It was none the less bitter."

"You mean," she said, "that you have become captain of your soul."

He knew that she was not ridiculing him.

"Something like that. I mean that I feel safe. It may be a delusion but I don't think that life can destroy me any more. I don't think, either, that it can force me to destroy others——"

"—as I have destroyed Gale," she murmured.

"And he you."

"I don't feel destroyed. I feel as though I were perched on the crest of a high wave waiting for it to break and throw me into the midst of life."

He did not answer. And she stood up with a sudden exasperated gesture.

"I must be going home," she said. "It's late. I've kept you abominably."

That, too, he left unchallenged. It was as though he had learned to put aside the meaningless exchanges, hardly hearing them. He walked beside her up the stairs to the exit.

"Perhaps I seem to have tried to lecture you," he said humbly, "but indeed I could not have done that. I couldn't even advise you. I don't know any way out for you. What I seem to know is only through intuition. I know that you are unhappy."

"I am going to be happy. Now you are silent again. You don't believe it. You make me want to hit you."

"That sounds a little desperate," he said.

"What do you want of me? That I should go back to Gale, torment him and be tormented?"

He smiled.

"If he were wise he wouldn't have you at any cost—now."

"Well—that's honest, and thank you for that and everything. You've been very good to me."

"I'm your friend," he said. "For that reason don't hit me—even in your thoughts."

He stood on the curb, hat in hand, as though she were some royal personage. And even when the taxi turned the corner into Pall Mall, glancing back, she saw that he had not moved. He made a curious but not ridiculous break in that hurrying, distracted stream of life. Justine felt that even to-morrow morning she wouldn't regret this interlude with him. He had disturbed and shaken but not shamed her. He had lifted her with him on the same height where he lived and from which he overlooked the whole of life with pity and passionate toleration. If she herself could not stay there, at least she had been there a little while.

Such a lovely July day. To-morrow was Goodwood. And afterward London would become again a vast old village where

you met people you knew on the streets and gossiped with them. Or you felt that you might, even if you didn't. Justine almost wished that she wasn't going down with the family to Whiteladies. It would be good to stay here alone and come close to the heart of this brooding, deep-hearted city, to wander about like an exile returned after many years.

Justine dismissed her taxi. She didn't care if she was late. She wanted to walk. A grubby little newspaper boy eyed her hopefully. The latest racing news stared out from his bilious yellow poster. Once it had been casualties—— Why couldn't they start another war, Justine thought, so that everyone could feel useful and important again—not crushed by this gray burden of futility? How splendid to be killed in battle instead of just petering out like a damp squib! That was why people allowed themselves to be beguiled into wars. They knew they were going to be killed anyway and they preferred to die of their own free will and after their own fashion—or as near to it as they could get. There was something honourable about death if you went out to meet it. Something purifying. If Justine had died on that retreat through Serbia she would have died a clean, decent human being—instead of this mess—this despicable mess.

For of course she had lied to Elliot. She wasn't going to be happy. She didn't really expect to be. She had done too many shameful, beastly things. She felt dirty with them. Gale and she had been too devilish to each other. They had used the knowledge that love had given them with such calculating malice. That was the awful part of it. Justine felt that thereby she had destroyed some vital integrity in herself that could never be restored. Well, then—one had to accept facts. What was left was life itself—Nat—love—a good time until one died—and the whole business was washed out and forgotten.

She walked past St. James's Palace and up St. James's Street. How lovable London was; how close it lay to her heart! She had known it under so many guises. And it had never seemed

to her more beautiful than in those war nights when only the hooded lamps and the moonlight broke the darkness of the composed and waiting streets. She remembered how once, recklessly enough, she had wandered on and on through the solitude. It was as though everyone were dead and the policeman who warned her only a revenant like herself.

"Better be getting home, miss. They'll be here in a few minutes."

She had laughed.

"They won't dare touch you!" she had retorted. And she had stood beside him and waited as though he really were an inviolable place of refuge and authority. They had talked quietly together. Such a queer conversation—queer under the circumstances. It was as though England herself spoke through the simple man. Justine remembered his toleration, his patience, his unboasting, good-humoured confidence in himself and in his people and how deeply he had reassured her (for these were the bad days). And when at length the silence was broken by a dull drone, by muffled gunfire that lifted minute by minute to a crescendo of wailing, screaming shells, he remained calm and untroubled.

"Must be just overhead, miss. You can tell them Gothas from our engines. They've got a deeper note, as you might say——"

He didn't attempt any more to drive her to cover. Perhaps he realized that she was an obstinate creature. Perhaps he was glad to have her with him. They looked up at the stars together. The surpassing beauty of the night. The surpassing beauty of that death. Those men hurling themselves against each other through the steady moonlight seemed no longer enemies, but figures in some splendid, horrific dance of life. There could be no hatred between them now. They must be loving each other terribly.

The fight went on all night. It came and went, died down, and rose again. Once a thud—dull and sinister—shook the ground under their feet.

"Very near that time, miss. Some poor devils gone west——"

The air overhead was ripped like calico. Any moment it might come now. They would never know about it. It would be sudden and complete. Other people would hear the blow fall. For them it would be nothingness. The policeman stood large and dark beside her, his gloved hands folded over each other, his face under the helmet shrouded in deeper shadow. To Justine he seemed in that crucial moment to attain a classic significance. He was Man himself looking with steady eyes into the eyes of his veiled and enigmatic destiny.

Quiet again. And toward dawn—silence. And then suddenly and very sweetly the bugle call. "All clear! All clear!" It seemed to come from all over the city at once, far and near, call answering call in a golden echo. The streets began to fill again, to come back to life. People in evening dress hurrying home and slum dwellers crowding out of the undergrounds with their babies and dogs and cats and canaries—going home, too.

A boy scout on his bicycle rode past, blowing his bugle gorgeously.

"All clear! All clear!"

And so to bed or to work, good citizens.

The tears rushed to Justine's eyes.

"Good-night, constable."

"Good-night, miss. I wish I always had a nice young lady to keep me company."

And now this London—serene and bustling, under the mild summer sun as though those nights had been forgotten. But London never really forgot. Everything that had ever happened to her she had added to herself. They might overcrowd her, debase her with pretentious buildings, vulgarize her with lurid, stupid signs, but she remained herself—at heart quiet and proud and kindly.

Goodwood to-morrow. Gale had loved Goodwood. He said

it was the prettiest, jolliest meeting on the calendar, a sort of pastoral affair where the countryside and the horses and the sunshine and the good-fellowship between man and man and man and beast were all that mattered. You didn't care whether you won or lost—and sometimes you forgot to bet altogether. It was just jolly.

Somehow at all three Goodwoods that they had had together they had been happy. They had been like faun and dryad—aloof from life, freed of their mortal chains, enchanted people.

Justine turned into the narrow side streets of Mayfair. Absurd—dangerous, even. But her feet took her. She wanted to see the little house. How quickly a place grew to look shabby and down at the heel when it was empty! The signboard still hung forlornly from the railings. Such a charming little house. Justine wondered why no one had come to take it. Perhaps everyone felt the unhappiness that had lived there.

She stood on the opposite side of the street and looked up at the closed windows. There was one day at least when the house had been home to her. It had been after a long period of galled misery. In despair she and Gale had separated for a time and she had gone up to Scotland to stay with her mother's people. And there one day she had been overtaken by an old, childish complaint that was associated with her earliest memories—a cruel earache that seemed to attack the very centre of her reason. She had said nothing about it—only that she had been called home.

She would never forget that slow bumbling little train. It stopped at every station. She remembered the rain sweeping in a gray veil across the moors and the stolid faces of the people. At last they joined the express and were flying southward. But even then the hours stretched into eternity; the pain became fiery red. She caught herself moaning softly like an animal. In the London station she didn't know which way to turn. There was no one to meet her. She hadn't had the sense to telegraph. Suppose Gale wasn't even at home! She wanted

Gale. He was all she wanted. But it was Sunday. He might have gone away. Then as the taxi turned the corner of the sunny little street—there he was, just getting into his car. He looked up. She saw the expression of his face—how its sullen bitterness became a surprise—anxiety, and at last a white, passionate tenderness. She clung to him in the narrow hall.

"Oh, Gale, what should I have done? Two minutes more—and you would have gone. What should I have done?"

"My darling—my poor sweetheart—it's all right now——"

Yes, it was all right now. The pain didn't matter any more. She was home, safe with him. He would make everything come right. She was like a child, letting him undress her, put her to bed, fuss over her with poultices, as gentle and efficient as though he had done nothing else all his life. And at last when the doctor had been and the pain was really better, he sat beside her, holding her hand in his, looking at her so earnestly, like a frightened boy.

"Is it really easier?"

"Oh, much easier. So comfy—so happy——"

"I can't bear you to have pain."

"It's been worth it—just to come home to you——"

He put her hand to his cheek. There it was. In spite of it all they belonged to each other. They were home to each other. They knew it for that day at least—even though the next day brought forgetfulness.

It was dusk in the quiet street. Justine went on her way. She felt that she had passed a coffin and said good-bye to the empty body of someone she had loved.

Jane met her in the hall. Jane was unexpected. She was supposed to be at Whiteladies resting. She didn't look rested. She looked pale and overstrained and feverish.

"I couldn't stick it," she explained. "So damn dull. Not a soul to play with. So I made Elizabeth bring me back. She's

wild with me. Her children are a great disappointment to her. They lack discipline——"

"What about Claire and Baise?"

"Oh, they're all right. They're disciplined. They'll be a great comfort to her in her old age. And they're so worthy. I hate 'em both."

There was a telegram on the hall table. Justine picked it up. It was addressed to her. Jane watched her darkly.

"That's from Nat, I suppose."

Justine refolded the yellow paper.

"Yes," she said. "He's coming home."

VII

1

A car was an unfamiliar object. It blocked the ancient gateway to the village like a piece of iron wreckage thrown up by the strange red sea. At least it did not seem possible that it could have come there by any other means. For it was ramshackle—a dead-looking affair—and white with dust. The driver himself, a sullen-featured townsman, sat at the wheel in an attitude of resigned and contemptuous indifference. It was as though he did not know how he had come to this remote place and never expected to get away from it. His passenger had climbed out into the roadway and was surrounded by a wide circle of silent and staring children. He was a diminutive creature—scarcely taller than the tallest child—and in his correct English clothes funny as an anachronism.

Gale, who had stopped short at sight of him, came on at a leisurely pace.

"So you've really arrived," he said, "and damn you for a stubborn, interfering little devil."

Powell almost ran to him. (And Powell running made even the children break into thin laughter.) He clasped both Gale's hands. His voice was breathy with weariness and relief.

"Thank God. I thought I must have made some mistake. This strange, haunted place, these strange people! I was almost frightened. I don't know any Spanish. If I hadn't met you——"

"And now you have met me——"

"Well—I thought perhaps—I have left my things at Tuella—still—*on peut toujours s'en tirer*——"

"No, you can't—not here. I'll show you my home later. There isn't a hotel, so you needn't look for one."

"Of course, I knew, Braddyl, that you don't want me. But I had to see you."

"Well—now you have seen me."

"I must talk to you."

Gale rubbed his hands over his thick matted hair.

"Let's talk, by all means. The night is yet young. Your brigand can drive you back by starlight. Sit down. You get a very excellent view from here, and this wall isn't much harder than most Spanish chairs. They're not great on comfort in these parts. If you've got any English cigarettes I'd be glad of one. I haven't had any decent tobacco for months."

Pepe drove the children back. He made no noise about it, but his gestures were so ferocious that they scattered before him to a respectful distance where they hovered, furtive but determined, like a flock of small, hungry buzzards. Pepe himself lingered unhappily. He did not like the look of this stranger who seemed so excited and who spoke to the Señor in his own tongue. There was something serious going on between them. Obviously they knew each other very well. The points of their cigarettes glowed like red friendly stars in the dusk. Pepe clambered onto the wall. He could just hear their voices. He was forgotten. Perhaps the stranger had come to fetch the Señor. Pepe knew instinctively that in the end everyone must go back to his own people. The Señor would go back. Pepe did not cry. But he was bowed down by a crushing desolation.

"It's good to have a decent cigarette again," Gale said. "I have learned to do without almost everything else, as you see." He stretched out his lean, powerful arms, displaying himself. He took a malicious pleasure in showing Powell his patched, earth-stained clothes. There was fair stubble on his chin and he knew that in Powell's eyes he did not even look clean. He talked on garrulously, with an insulting lightness. "I've gone native. The natives are a curious, interesting people. They have

stripped life to the bone. They have no use for the frills with which we endeavour to disguise it. In fact, they like the bone as it is. It's a hard morsel to bite on. If it breaks the teeth so much the better. Perhaps you have not been among them long enough to notice their delight in blood. There is blood everywhere—on their animals, in their pictures. The blood is symbolic of cause, of pain. They like pain. They accept it. It is God's will, and therefore why not make the best of it? Bite on it. Get the marrow out of it. Excellent idea. Nothing worries them. They have learned how to live because they have learned how to die."

Alfred Powell interrupted in a low voice:

"I am going to die, Braddyl."

Gale stopped to stare at him. The little fellow had, after all, a sort of dignity. His eyes were red-rimmed with fatigue and emotion. His pudgy hands were clasped together and he was looking toward the fiery rim of the horizon with an expression on the misshapen face that had a tragic value. But Gale did not choose to be drawn into tragedy. With a cold levity he fought off this close encounter.

"We all are."

"Not so soon as I am."

"What do you mean?"

"Just that I haven't time or strength to waste. If I go back to Tuella to-night I shan't see you again. Please understand that I only tell you this because I want you to listen and I know that under the circumstances you will have the chivalry not to reject me."

Gale smiled unwillingly. The affectations of the little man's speech had always amused him. To-night they had an added quality of unconscious pathos.

"Well—I don't reject you, as you put it. I didn't want you to come, Powell, because I knew no good could result from it. But here you are—and we might as well say whatever we have to say to each other."

"I want to tell you, Braddyl, about Margaret." He made a little fluttering movement of the hands. "Oh—I know it will seem strange to you that I should come all this way to talk about myself. You thought I had come to talk about you and Justine. So I have. I've come to talk about all of us."

"Is this to be an all-night sitting, then?" Gale asked.

"No. I am very tired. I shan't keep you long. I don't suppose I shall even have the power to make myself comprehensible. But I felt I must at least try. There are times when one must risk everything—even one's dignity as a human being. Not"—he added in an undertone—"one's dignity as a man. That, of course, I have never had."

Gale sat very still. He was glad that the dusk hung like a veil between them. These nakednesses were not pretty.

"You see," Powell went on in his usual high thin voice, "I knew quite well what all of you thought of me. I was a little monster who had somehow or other trapped a good and beautiful woman into an odious marriage. I made you sick—even when you were most sorry for me. You were kind—very kind. I think you imagined that I didn't see myself—as I was—that I didn't realize the ghastly thing I had done. It hurt me sometimes that you should think like that. It hurt me for Margaret's sake and also because it was pitiable that we—we human beings shouldn't be able to understand each other better. I did not mind about myself. I never allow myself to think about myself—I couldn't. And, then, too, I had enough to comfort me."

"My dear Powell—of what concern is all this——"

"To you? Perhaps none. Let us suppose that I am just anxious—*au fin des choses*—to unburden myself—to put myself and Margaret right in your thoughts. I have no real friends. My—my appearance—my body—has stood between me and friendship. In this strange place we are like disembodied spirits. We can scarcely see each other. You might imagine for a little while that I am a man like yŏurself."

"What makes you think I'm a man?"

"Please, Braddyl—please don't make fun of me. I know that you resent this intrusion. Don't make me pay too heavily for it. We have both suffered a great deal. Let that be, for this last time, a means of communion between us."

Gale turned his face away.

"Margaret died," he said involuntarily.

"You mean—that was more bearable? You don't know, Braddyl, you don't know. Death may not be the end. But when it comes it seems hideously conclusive. It has a way of shattering our values. For me it has meant an unendurable loneliness."

"Oh, loneliness——"

"Don't you think that I know what that means?"

"No—if we're to have the gloves off—no. One can endure what one is accustomed to. You said yourself that you had had to go without—without a normal intercourse——"

"Not altogether. I had the capacity to love. I could not be entirely isolated. I loved Margaret. I loved her as you loved Justine. That makes you wince, of course. It would have made Margaret shrink from me, if she had known. She never knew. We were just friends. Even that seems impossible and ridiculous to you."

"Oh, for God's sake, why do you want——"

"I want you to understand. Won't you let me tell you, Braddyl?"

"You are going to tell me, whether I let you or not," Gale said.

He turned sullenly toward the mountains. As the night came on the air had grown clearer. It was like polished steel. The mountains and the stars were reflected and magnified in its hard, bright surface. All the sounds that Gale associated with darkness—the distant screech of an ox cart, the isolated cries, the howlings of some tormented beast—dropped away. They had deserted him. They had left him to this voice—frail, unlovely, desperately pursuing.

"Margaret never saw me quite as you do. Even Paul didn't. We three had been children together—neighbours and playfellows—and so they were accustomed to me. Of course they knew that I was odd—different from themselves. But it didn't offend them. It was very wonderful the way they treated me. But then they were wonderful people. Paul didn't always understand. But he was kind and tolerant. He didn't understand Margaret either—not always. He was too robust—too vigorous. Often he made her very unhappy and she would come to me crying and I would comfort her. Even as a child she was very proud. She wouldn't have shown her grief to anyone who wasn't—as I was—outside life—an onlooker——"

"As I am," Gale thought, "as I am——"

"Then when they were to be married—some years before the War—Margaret fell ill. And afterward she knew that she would never be really well again. She might live for years—but always on the verge. She didn't tell him that. You see—he was very chivalrous, after his fashion, but also he was very human. He wanted Margaret—but he wanted life, too. She knew that he would make her marry him—for she loved him passionately—but that in the end they would both suffer. She came to me. She told me how things were. Day after day we talked about it. We used to walk in Kensington Gardens—up and down, up and down. People must have wondered, seeing us together. She was so beautiful in those days. Heartbreakingly beautiful. She knew that she had to save them both—and that she wasn't strong enough. We came very close to each other in those days. She knew that I asked nothing but the right to serve her. In the end she married me."

"And this Paul?"

"He acted as we knew he would. He was very bitter. He said she had sold herself. But in one terrible detail he made everything she had done valueless. For he was faithful to her. That killed her. Slowly—inch by inch. She never spoke of it. But I knew. And when the War came—he was a soldier—I told her

—to go to him—to tell him the truth—so that at the last——"

The breathy voice died out. Gale glanced at him quickly and then away again. The face was a white smear in the half-light.

"You see—even now—speaking of it hurts. And yet I swear to you, Braddyl, I have overcome. It is just my body—this ridiculous body that writhes under it. That will be dead soon, thank God, and I shall be wholly free. For she did go. They went away together. I had told her—she had the right—that I didn't feel—as a normal man. And she believed me. They had just three days. I was alone. I walked about the downs all night long—fighting—fighting till I was through—till I was master of myself—and of life, Braddyl—till I could go to meet her with a clean and tranquil heart."

"What is it you want of me?" Gale asked. "Do you want me to pity you?"

"No, not that—least of all, pity. I didn't need it then. I had attained something—some truth. I was made over. I was whole and free. I shall never forget the night we heard that Paul was killed. She held my hand as though it were the last thing on God's earth she had to cling to. You see, she didn't know that it was me she loved—that it was to the man I was somewhere in eternity that she had given herself. But I knew—and at the end she knew."

Gale stood up violently.

"Oh, for God's sake, Powell!"

"You think me indecent to tell you these things—so abruptly—so crudely. But that doesn't concern me any more. I am concerned with vital things. I had to tell you what I knew."

"What is it you knew?"

"That you and Justine——"

"Leave us out of it. You are on dangerous ground, let me tell you."

"There is no dangerous ground—not for me. I can go where I choose. Margaret and I loved you both. We used to talk about you. It was as though you were the embodiment of what we

might have been to each other—the substance of our shadows——"

Gale burst out laughing.

"My God—if you only knew how funny that was!"

"Don't—please—don't. You owe me that much respect. I have tried to tell you."

Gale stopped laughing. He turned with a gesture of contained and bitter violence.

"Very well," he said, "now I will tell *you*. If this is to be a competition in crude frankness, Powell, I have you beaten, hands down. Do you ever read your Apocrypha? You should. You really should. It has some fine eloquent passages. 'Like a eunuch embracing a virgin and groaning heavily.' What a magnificent metaphor! Those old fellows knew how to express themselves. They didn't mince matters. They got down to the heart of things. A eunuch, my dear Powell, a eunuch groaning heavily. That's what life has made of me. Now you know—and now leave me in peace."

The little man pressed his small white hands to his breast. He said pantingly:

"There is still something left—your humanity—your humanity, Braddyl."

"Oh, you fool—you God's fool—you——"

He strode down the hill, Powell trotting at his heels. The ramshackle car roared into activity. Pepe slid down from his perch on the wall. His throat hurt him. The Señor was going. He did not even say good-bye. He had forgotten. Even Leah, whom he loved, was forgotten. Perhaps Leah was dead. Death was a good thing. Pepe followed with his teeth set and his brown eyes narrowed to the blinding dust.

Gale looked back over his shoulder.

"Well, give me some news, at least," he said. "How are things? How's the world wagging? That excellent Baise, for instance—still hanging on to Claire's virginal apron strings?"

"They are to be married," Powell answered.

He coughed and wheezed like a broken-down concertina. It was disgusting there should be a soul locked in that absurd body. A monkey should be a monkey, Gale thought ragingly; a man should be a man. A Creator who made such ghastly fun of his creations would be blackballed by any decent club. Gale began to laugh again. He felt feverish and ill. Familiar objects had a strange look. The rocks and stones vibrated in the hot, dark air. It was as though they had a secret activity of their own which now, for some malicious reason, they revealed to him. He was being initiated into unholy mysteries.

"Well, they're happy then—or they think they are. And Baby Jane? I always had a weakness for Baby Jane. She had guts. She was like Justine—a small edition. And Captain Nathaniel Wynne—I suppose he and Justine——"

"Justine heard—just before I left. He was on his way."

"Only on his way? But of course he is a soldier. 'I should not love you, dear, so much——' and so forth. No doubt he has arrived by now. Thanks. My imagination has been a little previous. I shall have to begin again."

"Braddyl, it may not be too late."

"Tell Justine to go ahead. The evidence and the witnesses are provided. For that matter you yourself, my dear Powell, should come in handy."

They had reached Goana's old hut. Outside the open door the woman Chiquita crouched over a charcoal fire. She was cooking something. A spiral of steam climbed up slowly into the still air from the pot hanging from the iron tripod. In the mingled flame and twilight she looked witch-like, with her dirty hair hanging about her face and her red-rimmed eyes and battered, sinister mouth. She glanced up at the two men without greeting, and Gale made a sweeping gesture.

"This lady is my companion," he said. "This, from to-night on, is my home." He turned about and caught Pepe by the car.

"And this is my beloved and only son—immaculately begotten. Tell Justine so. It should amuse her."

The car waited. Powell moved toward it slowly. He tottered like a grotesque marionette whose strings have slipped through the careless fingers of the hidden performer. Gale watched him ironically. He seemed to have grown smaller. Twice he tried to drag himself into the high-built tonneau. He fell back gasping. With an exclamation of exasperated pity Gale ran to him and lifted him in his arms.

"Confound you, Powell—why did you come? I told you not to. I'm not fit—not fit——"

Powell clasped his hand feebly.

"It's—it's nothing. I understand—a little. We suffer so much. I did what I could. I'll send you my book—Margaret's book. Perhaps she—better than I—— Adieu, Braddyl!—adieu."

The strange face gazed back wistfully at him. Then it was gone. There was nothing left of Alfred Powell and his mission but the dust subsiding slowly on the roadway.

2

"What are you cooking, Chiquita?"

"Meat that I bought from Pascual. It is poor stuff. It was the best he had. I do not know what you wish——"

"Nothing. I am not hungry. Feed yourself and Pepe."

The woman and child looked at each other across the fire.

"Well—come here, then, little monkey."

Pepe came reluctantly. His wizened brown face was puckered with conflicting disgust and desire. For he feared Chiquita, but the steam that rose out of the black pot had a sweet savour in his working nostrils.

"Have you seen Leah?" Gale asked.

"Your dog? No, I have not seen her."

Gale sat apart from them, his back to the wall of the hut. It

was almost dark now. The heat seemed to have grown more intense—almost unendurable, as though the earth itself were suffering from a feverish and dangerous sickness. The flies were tormenting. Pepe and Chiquita sat in brutish silence. Their faces in the dying glow of the fire were like masks moulded out of the dark red earth. But Pepe's was a little comic mask of contentment. And Chiquita's, Gale thought, was ugly as life.

Presently Gale went into the single barely furnished room and came back carrying a native blanket which he threw down outside the range of firelight.

"I shall sleep here," he said.

Chiquita stood over him, her arms akimbo. There was a lewd challenge and defiance in her posture.

"And I?"

"Where you choose."

"What do you want of me?"

"Nothing."

He could feel her frustrated hatred thrashing this way and that, seeking an outlet. But he took no further notice of her and she swung away from him with a swirl of her long, soiled skirts. He could hear her moving about in the darkness of the hut—the rustle of straw in her corner, and then a period of watchful silence. She was waiting, cynical and incredulous. It was extraordinary how she hated him—more even than the men who had done her wrong. But then, at bottom, all men and women hated each other. They needed each other too desperately—beyond all right and sense, beyond their self-respect, and they could not forgive each other that power.

At last Chiquita stretched herself out, sighing like a tired, relaxed animal. And with that sound the last gleam of daylight seemed to fade out. The walled village, rising from the mountain spur, became a king, towering blackly over the plain. His long mantle hung from his shoulders and was carried by the mountains behind him in invisible procession. There were

gleaming gems in his crown. The sky was a dark polished shield blazing with his heraldic device of stars.

Pepe stood aloof, his hands thrust into the belt of his ragged trousers, his face to the fire. He had lost his vagabond's air of gallant, unreckoning assurance. He looked childishly grave as though for the first time he envisaged life as a strong enemy who could hurt him in new and terrible ways. There was another pain besides that of hunger. He had felt its claws, and nothing would ever be the same again.

Gale watched him curiously. This was Anna's son. He was nine years old. Anna had never given herself to anyone but Gale. She had told him so and his belief had caused him a brief poignant distress—a sudden consciousness of the harsh unpitying quality that underlay the calm beauty of the place—of something tragically austere in Anna herself that had lifted their relationship into an emotional isolation. Love had played no part in it for either of them. They knew nothing of each other. But for both the episode had been an escape into another world. It had had an idyllic charm which for him at least had been swiftly submerged by the tide of his first great passion. He had almost forgotten it. It was odd enough to make one believe in a malicious destiny that it should have carried within itself this enduring and ironical significance.

"Señor, where shall I sleep?"

"Where you like, Pepe."

"I would like to sleep near you."

Gale threw out a corner of his blanket.

"You can sleep here."

"Would you like me to look for Leah again?"

"No, it's of no use. If she's alive she'll find her way to us."

But Pepe did not lie down. He seemed overwhelmed with an unfamiliar timidity. He crouched on the edge of the blanket, his arms locked about his knees, his face averted.

"You—you didn't go away, señor."

"Go? Where did you think I was going?"

"With the strange, small Señor—back where you belong."

"But I don't belong—— Well—if I had, would you have minded?"

The boy's voice sounded thin and tired. It had seemed to Gale that Pepe didn't know how to cry. Now he was very close to tears.

"I'm glad you didn't go, señor."

"I shouldn't go—at least not like that. I wouldn't leave my friends."

"Who are your friends, señor?"

"Well, you and Leah and I are friends, aren't we?"

But Pepe was not comforted. It was as though his grief lay in the discovery of his helplessness and this new capacity for suffering. He said, "Yes, señor," submissively and sorrowfully.

Gale lay back with his hands clasped behind his head. Now he could see only the stars. But he knew that Pepe was watching him warily like an animal who suspects a trap. Well, he was caught already. It was too bad. He had been such a care-free, small soul. And now he had begun, like everyone else, to build his happiness on the unstable ground of human affection. He had begun to suffer. Gale stretched out his hand. He said pityingly:

"It's all right, Pepe—don't cry."

"I'm not, señor."

But he crept nearer. Sighing faintly he lay down within the circle of Gale's arm.

It was not warmth he sought. The heat was suffocating. An instinct strong as life drew them together—as perhaps it had drawn Gale from his own world to this only possible reassurance. These things were fundamental. There was no escape from them. He and Justine had defied them at their cost.

His son. He felt his heart beat thickly, with a dark primitive excitement. And yet at first he had not wanted to believe. He had got up and walked fast down the hill, calling for Leah, holding the thought by the throat. And when at last it had torn

itself free, forcing him to confront it, a kind of fury had descended on him. It was as though an enemy had witnessed an unendurable humiliation and had laughed. He needed some outlet of physical violence to escape the biting, galling torment of that laughter.

His son. But not hers. Not Justine's. A loyalty that he had thought buried finally under the bitterness of their married life sprang to her defence. It was like one of these brief poignant reconciliations—as on that day when she had run home to him with her earache and clung to him for comfort—when nothing but Justine herself had mattered. His son. But not hers. A strange woman, the casual victim of his young, light-hearted unscrupulousness, had borne her child. He had done Justine that wrong. And the years of austere fidelity—his very griefs against her counted for nothing. He loved her direly. And it was as though in the midst of that love he had found himself to be unfaithful. His pride was broken. He needed her forgiveness —and then to be lost—to be wiped out of his own memory. He had shrunk from Pepe with a crazy and cruel loathing.

All that was over. The tide of emotion rolled back, leaving scarred and naked rocks. By this time Justine and Nat might be together. At this very moment—— But he was no longer defenceless against the thought of them.

Gale drew Pepe roughly closer to him. But Pepe, once he had fallen asleep, was not easily disturbed. The sound of his quiet breathing reassured Gale. For there had been times in this alien place when he had doubted his own reality. He had seemed to himself like a phantom in the dreams of some feverish sleeper, liable to sudden, inexplicable disintegration. But here was testimony that at least once he had lived deeply and strongly. The events of his life took on form and sequence. He could believe in them again. He could believe in his young manhood which had become incredibly remote, in the War, in the disaster of his marriage. The overshadowing village dropped for a while its mantle of dark enchantment. It was no more than

the strange background to events whose significance he could not even now evaluate. They seemed wholly disastrous. Yet remembering the night when Justine and he had sat before the shepherd's fire, listening to the footfalls of their common destiny, he could recapture the sense of inevitability and a certain greatness in their relationship. It was hard to believe that they could have been so utterly deceived. It was perhaps simply that nothing lasted, not even truth.

But whatever had happened it was no longer part of a crazy phantasy. If the events were tragic they were at least made up of a man's life. They made up the entity that was still Gale Braddyl.

Toward Justine his mood had shifted. He thought of her with an obscure triumph. He was armed against her. He could give her blow for blow. He could hurt her, if he chose, as terribly as she could hurt him, had perhaps already hurt him.

He moved sharply. And Pepe stirred in his hot sleep. Thereafter Gale tried to keep his thoughts in abeyance. Pepe was very tired. They had wandered about for hours looking for Leah, and Pepe had been strangely anxious. It was as though he understood for the first time what Gale and Leah meant to each other. He wanted to give back to Gale the thing he loved. He knew Leah's loneliness and fear.

If Vicente had killed Leah—— Well, Gale would teach friend Vicente a lesson. And then he and Pepe would go away together to the other end of the world. Pepe Braddyl. An absurd name. He would have to be called Philip—Philip Braddyl. Gale smiled grimly into the dark.

He tried to recall Pepe's features. He was like Anna, his mother. But more than anything else he was like the red-brown earth that had so sparely nourished him. It was in vain that Gale sought in some fleeting look or gesture the shadow of himself. The puckered brown face was wholly alien—as alien as Pepe's mind with its sharp realism, its flashes of almost mystical perception. No, there was nothing between them but the

strong, blind instinct of the flesh which had drawn them to each other. It was enough, Gale thought. It would endure after other less elemental relationships suffered shipwreck. The flesh dominated life. It was the root of all human emotion—even of what was called the spirit.

Gale tried to sleep. But he only attained a feverish confusion. Absurd, disjointed pictures jostled each other through his brain. Sometimes he was still looking for Leah, wandering through a maze of narrow, unfamiliar streets, the rays of a brutal sun beating on his naked head, a dog's howl in his ears. He was Alfred Powell in love with Margaret, who was dead. (But Margaret had Justine's face.) He was Baise Lindesfarne who was terribly unhappy. He saw Justine and himself as lovers. But the next moment he knew that he had made a mistake. It was another man. Nat and Justine together. He sprang to clear wakefulness, hearing the echo of his own groan.

The sound might have been part of his dream. Pepe had not stirred. But outlined against the starlight Gale saw Chiquita standing over him. He kept his eyes half-shut so that she should not see that he was awake. For several minutes she remained there in an attitude of intense contemplation. It was as though now that he was helpless she was trying to rifle him of some secret. He wondered if she wanted to kill him. She hated him enough. But presently she was gone as silently as she had come.

It was odd that though he did not know Nat at all he could see him clearly; whereas Justine, except in sudden flashes of vision, eluded him. Perhaps he dared not see her. But there had always been something elusive in her physical appearance, as though her body were only the mirrored reflection of her quick and variable spirit. But Nat was strong and definite and inflexible. He was like a photograph that imprinted itself

meaninglessly on the memory. Gale could see every line of that dark face. It told him nothing.

They met for the first time at Nat's chambers in the Albany. Nat, it appeared, was home on long leave and wanted to give a dinner in celebration. Justine and he were old friends. They had run into each other at the Chelsea Arts Ball and afterward they had lunched together. Beyond an unhappy side glance at these other lunches, now only a dangerous memory, the fact made no impression on Gale's mind. It did not even seem strange to him that Justine's efforts to bring Nat and himself together invariably failed—that Nat seemed to evade the encounter. His distrust was not yet of any individual but of the whole force of life. His marriage was breaking up. But Justine and he were breaking it together, driven themselves by inexorable laws which they had been powerless to defy. Gale didn't know that the third necessary element of destruction was now at hand.

He knew that night——

He could not remember clearly what he had felt toward Nat himself. Certainly not dislike. They were so far apart that even now it was difficult to hate him personally. It was easy to hate Justine. Nat was darkly masculine and mature and reasonable. His passions might be strong, but never unmanageable. He might suffer—looked indeed as though he had suffered—but would never be overwhelmed by suffering. If he committed murder—and that, too, was possible—it would be done as he did everything, for a good reason and without fuss or impatience. It would be as admirably conceived and carried out as his dinner party. He had the charm of that assured purpose.

He made a good host—after the fashion of the conventional Pukka Sahib who knew how things ought to be done from long practice in the more lavish circumstances of an Anglo-Indian station. Toward Gale he showed himself unobtrusively friendly. But beneath the friendliness was a subtone of irony difficult

to encounter. It was as though he and Gale had known each other a long time, but for reasons of their own chose not to acknowledge each other. In this uneasy impression Gale was strengthened by the familiarity of his surroundings. He had lived in the Albany before the War. The rooms were haunted for him by himself. Gradually the desire to escape from the place and from his obscure distress became almost unendurable. At dinner he drank heavily, trying to befuddle himself into unawareness.

After dinner Nat played to them. He played with something of the bravura of the professional—an unexpected accomplishment in a soldier—and once in the midst of the scented sweetness of a nocturne he glanced across at Justine. He smiled faintly. She had been watching him. Her face was almost wan and its intense gravity more eloquent than any gesture of response. A signal had been exchanged. And on Nat's side the signal had been one of power and understanding. He knew everything—at least everything that mattered. Whether Justine had told him or whether his knowledge was intuitive seemed to Gale, in that bitter moment of revelation, a matter of no importance. It was enough that he was in possession of the secret wretchedness of this outwardly successful marriage. He had the bearing of a man who has waited and can wait a little longer.

Without a word Gale had got up and left the place He had passed beyond the control of the conventions. What happened to him in the interval he did not know, but by the time Justine and he faced each other he had wrought himself into a state of mad clear-headedness. He knew that he was tearing down their house in ruins, but since that ruin was inevitable he found a perverse and terrible relief in hastening the destruction. He accused her of an infidelity that he did not believe to be true in fact. But it was true in spirit. He had lost her. And that was all the truth that mattered.

The next day they had attained an exhausted reconciliation

and for a little while he chose to ignore what he knew. But that night he had prophesied. To her, unaware of that unmerciful prevision, he realized that he must have seemed monstrous—a drunken and disgusting fool. She could not have known that in a flash he had witnessed the whole future of his humiliation. He had seen the two of them ride over him, not perhaps without pity, but without remorse, since what they did was part of the very scheme of life. And he had nothing, in his own defence, but the brute strength of his hands.

He had not used that strength. The time for that sort of thing was past. In spite of the War he was too civilized. And, besides, he had still the remnant of an old decency—a persisting sense of justice. It was not her fault. It was not anyone's fault—not even Nat's. So he had cleared out—without dignity—but still he had cleared out. And now as a reward he could rot in the hell of his imagination.

Nat and Justine. Gale had loved her. He knew what she had made of even their maimed and twisted life. And now he had been scrapped, like the broken, maladjusted piece of mechanism that he was, and Nat, the sound, uninjured, perfectly functioning Nat would slip into his place. There was not a detail of their happiness that Gale could not and would not have to visualize. He remembered the crude old legend of a man, tied hand and foot, compelled to witness his wife's betrayal of him. It was like that. These two took him with them into their last intimacy. They could not help themselves. Their lives were inextricably interwoven. Lucky for them that they would be too lost in their own passion to be aware of his tormented ghost.

He could not sleep. He could not rest. His body ached. There was sickness and fever in the hot air—sickness and fever in his thoughts. He sat up. The fire had died out, but he knew that there was something moving in the dark. He could hear the rustle of the burnt grass. He held out his hand.

"Leah," he whispered. "Leah——"

"What is it, señor? Has she come back?"

Pepe was like a mongrel terrier himself—instantly alert, ears pricked, eyes shining into the dark.

"Yes—I think so—there's something wrong though——"

She was quite close now. But she was coming very slowly. He could hear her panting and the heavy scuffle of her body. It was as though she were ashamed and was crawling to him for forgiveness. He reassured her gently.

"All right—all right, Leah."

She lay down beside him. Her muzzle touched his hand. He felt the roughness of her tongue. It was for the first time. And it did not seem absurd to him that he should feel suddenly happier. Once, when he had been no older than Pepe and, for all the care-free luxury of his life, scarcely less lonely, he had been punished for some small sin. And afterward stifled with the outraged dignity of childhood, he had hidden himself away in a neglected corner of the garden and the first Leah had sat beside him, panting her grief, and licked the tears from his face. And he had felt as he did now, comforted and befriended. Between that child and himself lay only a few years. And in those years not much had happened to the real Gale Braddyl.

He ran his hand over her. His hand was wet—stickily wet. She whimpered but without protest. He put his hand to his face. He had a sudden piercing vision of a terrible road, covered with dust and stones, and of this poor pilgrim—this fanatic upheld by a last faith.

"Señor, what is it?"

"Nothing, Pepe—nothing——"

For a while he sat quite still. A blinding wave had broken over his head. It passed. But it left him definitely changed. The confused and dissipated forces of violence in him had rallied to a single point. His hatred of the incomprehensible cruelty of life focussed itself. He lifted the bleeding and

battered body in his arms. His tenderness was the measure of that hatred. He wanted to kill. His hands were hot with the desire of death.

3

But after all it couldn't be done—not like that, at least—not suddenly. He couldn't go up to Vicente sitting there at his table, with his lean young face full of pride and defiance and a curious shame, and simply strike him down. There were certain decent preliminaries observed by even the most primitive. He had to await the signal—the breaking point.

And then again he was daunted by the place itself. On the way up the steep, dusty road he had felt its strangeness gathering against him. It was lost in its own past, indifferent to living passion as are the dead. And yet it had a quality of life. The sounds that he had grown to associate with nightfall lay under a pall of memories whose tragic texture lent premonition to the silence. What had been would rise again out of the hot stones—repeat itself under the same stars.

The moon lay waiting beyond the mountains. But the Plaza had already the transparent luminousness of a dead body. It was bleached-looking. The houses were like dead faces, already touched by corruption, hollow-eyed, with black, formless mouths gaping an evil suffocating odour.

The ramparts were black and deserted. Above them the stars danced feverishly. In their shadow, sharp-drawn on the white dusty stones the children lay inert, their voices lifting in little gusts like the sudden twittering of birds. Gale noticed a small red flag hanging from the house of old Luis, the rope maker. That meant that death was coming to the village. Beiza, spreading out his rat-eaten pall, had known that it was coming.

Women passed up and down the steps leading to the church. They vanished into the black archway like ghosts. When they

came out, part of the shadow seemed to have detached itself and taken on human life. Their long skirts made a soft murmur as they moved. A few came together and stood in a little group, as though they were waiting for something to happen. But for the most part they passed swiftly up the Calle de la Virgen, not speaking to each other, like members of a sisterhood bound to expiatory silence. At the tables outside Balthazar's *fonda* the men sat aloof. The dominoes and cards lay scattered before them. They too waited, patient and inscrutable.

The dogs gathered. They slunk out of their hiding places in the broken walls and in the pest-infected alleys. Their tongues lolled out, dripping saliva. They moved round Gale in a wide circle, like witches in a dance, their eyes fixed on him in a luminous mad stare.

Gale felt his own strangeness and his loneliness. The men at the tables were watching him. Their hostility had culminated. Vicente had given the signal. In their minds there could be only one outcome to the fight between them. He had thrust himself into their life at his own peril.

Father Valeza came down the steps from the church. His *birreta* made a tall sable-crowned king of him. But as he saw Gale he stopped short, his hand on the stone parapet, and Gale knew how pitiably afraid he was. Fear and loyalty warred in him and destroyed him. He came on at last, hurrying past as though on an important errand, his breviary pressed against his breast, his ravaged face averted. But Gale caught his warning.

"Don Cristóbal is ill. He cannot protect you. Go away from here, señor, for the love of Christ."

Gale looked after him ironically.

"In my own time," he answered to himself.

The priest went on down the steep white road to the plains. He was running away—anywhere where he shouldn't see or know. He, too, was a damned soul, pursued by furies. The

Virgin, it seemed, did not forgive men who loved knowledge more than her divinity.

Gale walked over to the silent and crowded tables. Even Balthazar who, after Luis, had shown him the most friendliness, was against him now. He stood with folded arms, outfacing Gale with his beady, belligerent eyes.

"I forgot my pensioners, señor," Gale said lightly. "I was looking for a lost friend of mine. The poor devils must be starving. If you have their food ready they'll be glad, and I can get home to bed."

There was laughter—faint, malevolent. But Balthazar's face remained set.

"There is no food for them."

"Well—then for me."

"Nor for you either."

"Come, Balthazar, you are an honest man. You should give me what I have paid for. If you want to cut my throat afterward—why, that is another matter."

The innkeeper glanced over his shoulder. Vicente made a decisive movement.

"No."

Gale waited. He knew that his own strangeness baffled them. He was an unknown force, and each man hesitated within himself. But with the first blow they would be freed. Gale went over to Vicente's table. He stood close to him, looking down at him meditatively. The young man half rose, and then fell back as though for the moment dominated by that cool, impersonal regard.

"I am surprised, Señor Balthazar," Gale said, "that you should show so little compassion to these dogs of mine who are, after all, harmless creatures, when you feed a swine like this at your table."

He heard the sound of their breath drawn sharply between their teeth. Vicente stood up. He was as tall as Gale. There was not the breadth of a hand between their eyes.

"Of whom are you speaking, señor?"

"Of whom but yourself, Señor Vicente? For a long time I have suspected you of being a mean and treacherous coward. Now it gives me pleasure to tell you so—after my fashion."

He had meant to fight. But now his need to hurt and humiliate in his turn became unbearable. It dared him to trust to an old trick—án old strength. Suddenly his arms were locked behind the slender young body. As easily as if Vicente had been a child he lifted him, held him aloft a moment, ridiculing him, and then flung him crashing down among the tables.

Now every man was on his feet. But though they strained toward Gale like hounds on the leash, they still waited. This had become Vicente's affair. They would not insult him with their defence.

"Take care, señor, take care. He has a knife——"

"He is welcome to it," Gale answered.

But he turned, laughing. He had recognized the voice. As usual old María was bitterly angry with him. But she was not like the priest or the other woman who ran away. She covered him with her body.

"Now go, can't you? Has God deprived you of your wits, you accursed heretic? Go—I tell you. As to you, Jaime Balthazar"—she shook her fist in the innkeeper's face—"you are a fool and a rascal. If harm comes to this madman, it will be Don Cristóbal who will make you answer for it."

"Even Don Cristóbal could not save him now," Balthazar retorted sombrely.

He pushed her on one side, clearing the space between Gale and his adversary. Vicente had risen to his feet. The thin brown face was drawn and sick-looking with passion. But also, as Gale remembered afterward when he no longer hated him, there was bewilderment in his eyes, and a kind of grief. He spoke almost quietly, holding himself with an exaggerated and yet natural dignity.

"On Sunday the Duke has called me to Madrid for the

corrida," he said. "That is my first duty. On my return, señor, I shall answer you—unless indeed you should prefer to run away."

"I am not a bullfighter," Gale retorted, smiling. "And so I shall have no good excuse for running."

"And now, señor," Balthazar cried out, beating his fist upon a table, "your account is with me and we are free to settle it together."

Gale turned negligently. He was grinding his heel in the face of someone who had wronged him. It was Balthazar—or Vicente—or Nat—or God himself.

"I admit that one may be a brave man and a bullfighter," he said in a tone of judicial consideration. "One may be a brave man and a wine seller, for that matter. But I have seen clowns in a circus show more courage than your average *espada* ever needs to show. What is the bull? A poor, bewildered fool who doesn't even know the rules of the game. You take care of that, señores. No bull lives to tell the tale or to take a second chance with you. And you know every trick of his—what tricks he has, poor brute. Yes—a slip, of course, might be fatal. It can be fatal on the tight-rope, on the mountain, on the street, or here in Señor Balthazar's *fonda*—as Señor Vicente knows."

"You are unwise," Balthazar said heavily. "You have come among us unasked. You have affronted our customs, you have defied them. You are a rich man. You have insulted our poverty by seeming to share it with us. You would have done well to have held your tongue on this last matter. It is a coward who laughs at risks he would not dare to take himself."

"Have I done that?" Gale asked. "Where is your bull, Señor Balthazar? If it would amuse this company I will bring the famous El Grande to his knees without sword or *muleta*—without any weapons but these hands."

There was laughter again like a gust of hot, poisonous wind.

"When?" Balthazar asked, smiling.

Gale lifted his face to the stars.

"The light is excellent. Why not now, señores?"

A foot track led down from the ramparts to the pasture land where Balthazar's herd grazed during the dry months. Balthazar led the way and behind him came Gale and the men and children of the village. They walked in single file, drawing a winding line of shadow down the mountain side. Behind them the high walls of the village and the great tower loomed up desertedly, seeming to listen to the harsh voices slowly sinking into the distance.

Old María stumbled at Gale's heels. She was the only woman among them all. And to-night she was very old. She caught her breath like a child who has been crying. The stones slid from under her awkward feet. Gale turned and waited for her. He took her by the arm and they went on side by side as best they could. He felt as though he were going to his execution and that in this procession of his judges he had to uphold and comfort her. She was like his mother.

"What folly—what wickedness—El Grande, the fiercest bull in Navarre! Why have you done this foolish thing?"

"I don't know—perhaps I am tired of myself—tired of being ridiculous. Perhaps I want to make somebody else feel a fool."

"But if you are killed—what will become of him?"

"Ah, that's all you care about."

"You are his friend," she mumbled.

"Does that mean you are mine—well, that makes four—you and Pepe and Leah and Don Cristóbal."

"If you are killed, what shall I tell him?"

"Tell him," said Gale with a large gesture, "that I went down to the plains and fought the Emir under the eyes of his armies. Tell him we fought through the heat of the day and that at dusk we fell under each other's swords. Tell him that

the Emir's men have taken his body and marched back to their own land, and that the siege is over."

"Then he will die, señor. He is very tired. He wants to die."

"Let him go in peace, Mother."

No one but María spoke to Gale. The children ran backward and forward, peering up into his face. They did not laugh. But their silence was more cruel than laughter. Gale thought of Pepe. He wanted him. Between them ran the warm tide of an instinctive love. Neither of them would be alone again. Unless he were killed——

Gale touched Balthazar on the arm.

"I have left letters with the woman Chiquita," he said, "but I do not trust her. You, Señor Balthazar, are an honest gentleman. If your bull should be cleverer than I am, please see that my letters are sent to their destination. I leave Pepe and Leah—if the poor brute lives—to your charity until my people come for them——"

Balthazar looked back over his shoulder.

"What are they to you!" he asked. "Are you a madman?"

Gale did not answer. They had reached the level of the plain. A stout wall of rubble guarded a triangle of land between the mountains and the river. At the apex the river rolled against the base of precipitous rocks so that for the cattle there was no escape save up the steep and barren sides of the mountain. The herd seemed not to have moved since Gale had seen it in the afternoon's sunlight. It stood in dark and motionless meditation by the river's edge, making a complete shadow in the white mist of starlight. Balthazar put his finger to his lips.

"It is too soon," he said. "Wait a little."

They were silent—listening for the approaching footfalls. As the moon lifted her pale rim above the serrated edge of the eastern mountains they sighed deeply in salutation and the light falling on their grave faces was her answer to them. Between her and them the bull El Grande stood alone. He was like a block of hewn granite, immense and sombre with

the force within him. He swung his great head toward the intruders, broodingly aware. They could see the curved horns like scimitars outlined against the light.

Balthazar clicked his tongue in ecstasy.

"Not in Castile itself is there such another."

Gale swung himself over the rough wall. He showed them his empty hands.

"You see, I have nothing else," he said.

"Then go with God," Balthazar retorted grimly.

Gale walked on through the thin, dry grass. He felt as a man might do who has been led by his misfortunes to the confines of the world to face after his own fashion the blind, destructive force of life. He felt quite alone. Even the hostility of the villagers had been outdistanced. He had no definite thoughts, no clear purpose. There was a dream abroad in which he was about to play some part, dictated by an invisible destiny perhaps before the creation of the world. In that dream he was an actor at once vital and trivial, nameless and significant. Somewhere or other there was another Gale Braddyl, who would not have understood this dream, who was concerned with other things. That Gale Braddyl was like a wooden effigy of his own spirit.

The bull waited for him. He was undisturbed. The night belonged to him. This approaching phantom was only one of the many phantoms that came and went through his formless brooding. Gale stretched out his hand and laid it in greeting on the bony ridge between the horns. At the touch El Grande became aware of him as a man. He backed away, slowly, without anger but with astonishment. He was like a mystic whose vision has taken form before him. Gale could feel the glow gathering in the fierce, meditative eyes. He heard laughter—faint and illusive as self-mockery. He thought of the villagers as vultures rejoicing over the enmity of honourable men. He came nearer. It seemed to him that the bull knew of this dream from which neither of them could escape. He waited. Gale took

hold of the horn nearest him and vaulted, straddling the great shoulders. And for a moment he saw the whole panorama of mountain, plain, and river, and the stars and moon and himself painted faintly on the grass like the shadow of a centaur. It seemed to him that the bull and he were locked forever in that terrific immobility.

The bull lifted his head. He sent a shout echoing among the stars. It was, Gale thought, as though a trumpet signal had sounded and the gates of a vast arena had swung open for them. The invisible audience of the gods sat in the high places of the mountains.

They rode out together.

They danced, swaying body to body, to the inaudible orchestra of the spheres. Their movements were as ancient, as preordained as life itself. Gale felt the giant muscles swell and leap between his thighs. He listened to them with his own muscles, foretelling and answering them—yielding to a gesture that was too strong for him. The great horns swung rhythmically to the beat of hoofs on the dry ground.

Gale had ridden unbroken horses in his playtime in the world. The memory seemed pale and unsubstantial. This was the reality beyond reality—the very substance of the dream.

It endured endlessly. They became part of an eternal struggle. They groaned together like victims of a power outside themselves that would not let them yield. The dust rose under them, adding a dry torment to the heat. But their bodies were drenched. The stars swayed like the lights of an imperilled ship on a black, hurricane-swept ocean.

The bull stood still at last. His head lifted, he contemplated the silver and sable mountains. So might some hero of mythology have surveyed his world before the last godlike act. He quivered, gathering strength from the furthest frontiers of his great body. Then, as at a signal flashed at him from the stars, he charged.

And now they rode together. The hot wind sang like blood in Gale's ears. Stars and mountains flew past each other. He rode the earth itself, hurtling through space. He could hear the thunder of the worlds. His body was cracking. It was being torn asunder. It dissolved to water. The water flooded into his breaking eyes. His hands slipped on the smooth horns that almost swept the ground. His lungs were bleeding. But once he heard a man shout—singing in exultancy.

He rode a god, as tragic, as foredoomed as he himself. They were bound together on this adventure which had been ordained for them. They bore each other to the apex of the savannah—headlong to the rocks. They would not stop for that. Their blood and bones would be melted into the mountains—become part of them forever.

But at the last, according to the sudden dictate of the dreamer, El Grande swung aside. They plunged roaring over the steep bank of the river. The water closed over them. But even then they did not lose each other. Their heads lifted above the slow, dark tide. The bull's horns were like the horns of Isis. Gale swam beside him, holding to the fringe of the great neck. The moonlight and the water streamed into their faces. They were like lovers—dead lovers. For Gale believed that he was dead. It was inhuman that his disrupted body should still live on—that his living mind should be capable of this beatitude.

The bull touched ground. Gale rode him reeling and stumbling up the slimy bank. It was over. At the crest they stood for a while, emptied and reconciled. Gale sat loose, with his arms at his sides. There would never be any happiness like this. He was beaten. But the end was sweet. He was free. There was no enmity between the bull and him. Not any more. They had ridden together. And in that ride they had belonged to each other.

El Grande lurched, pitching Gale gently from his shoulders.

But Gale could hardly stand. His legs gave under him. He was crying with weakness and a kind of grief. It was as though he had broken something whole and beautiful.

The villagers came across the savannah. They did not hate him now. They belonged to him. But he hated them. He did not want them to see the bull kneeling there. He tried to shield the bull with his body. And first among them he saw Vicente with the look of death in his face.

The bull rose slowly. But he did not move away. He stood with his head bowed as though warned by an old memory how he should receive the final thrust. Gale laid his hand on the drenched and quivering flank.

"The bull is mine, Balthazar."

Balthazar spread out his arms.

"You have broken his heart." But he came up to Gale and kissed him on either cheek. "Do what you will with him. For you, too, are a brave man, señor, and my brother."

VIII

1

I DON'T understand people," Elizabeth Lindesfarne said, "and so I don't criticize them."

She stood in Claire's dismantled drawing room and pulled on her doeskin gloves in preparation for departure. She looked more than usually competent to deal with life. Tailor-made clothes and brogued walking shoes, if they seemed incongruous with her marked femininity, did also accord with the something direct and simple in her. She was at home among the fields as she was at home in Bond Street, but in a fashion of her own. She took nature as she took artifice, as part of an English lady's proper background.

"All the same," she added, "I'm sorry. I think Baise has had a hard time at your hands, Claire. All my children seem very peculiar." She kissed them both in her cool way, which was so unreasonably flattering. "It must be your father's fault," she said quite seriously.

"Clive would be delighted if he thought so," Justine commented. "Want me to walk home with you?"

"No. Why walk when you have a horse? Thanks all the same, my dear. I shall enjoy being alone."

"You won't have a chance. Clive will come to meet you. He can't help himself."

"Your father is very restless," Mrs. Lindesfarne admitted. She looked amused and faintly pleased. "He pretends something dreadful might happen to me."

They watched her through the window as she went down the

path between the fuchsia bushes. Her trim vigorousness delighted them. She had no real part in their lives and yet they knew that she added immeasurably to their respect for life.

"She just thinks we're mad," Justine said. "And," she added grimly, "I don't blame her."

"And I must seem the maddest of us all," Claire whispered.

She looked round her. All her pretty things gone—gone to live with Baise. Soon they would be back again. No one knew that but herself.

There was a fire burning. Autumn stood on her threshold. But the fire fought not so much the encroaching chill as the destitution—the room's emptiness. Justine bent toward it, her elbow on her knee, her hand clasped in her thick red hair. The mud-stained riding things made her look very young. But her attitude had a gravity, a composure that does not go with youth. She knew all about unhappiness, Claire thought, but she had come to accept it quietly. She no longer fussed about it, even in herself.

They didn't know what to say to each other. They were so intimate. They knew so little.

"Did you have a good run, dear?" Claire asked timidly. "I woke early. I thought of you. It was such a lovely sunrise."

"Yes, it's always lovely in a way, you know—the mist and the colours and the horses. Even people have a sort of charm, as though it was too early for them to begin pretending."

"Did Peterkins behave?"

"The perfect sportsman. You'd think he'd gone cubbing all his life. Fitzgerald looked after him. I didn't stay. I love the background of it all. But I can't stand the thing itself."

"You used to."

"Oh, I know. And even now I can't hear that absurd horn without wanting to be off; I do want the pursuit—the speed—the risk—everything that goes with it. But there's something in me that refuses—that won't let me. I suppose I'm sick of pain, Claire—of hunted things. It may be all right—it may

be an inevitable part of life. I don't know. But I can't take part in it any more—not consciously, with my eyes open. I had to ride away."

Claire sat upright, with her hands folded closely in her lap.

"You think I'm cruel, don't you?"

"Well—I'm like Elizabeth. I try not to criticize. Claire, look here—I know you can't tell her. Can't you tell me?"

"There's nothing—only that I can't go through with it—not yet. I—I made a mistake to say this autumn. It was too soon. I wasn't sure enough."

"Oh, my dear—my dear——!"

She looked at Claire. She ought to despise her. Claire had treated Baise—was treating him—shamefully. But for some reason as yet beyond explanation Justine knew that there was nothing shameful about Claire. Her small white face had the composure and even the peace of an honourable unhappiness. It had an unfamiliar strength.

"I know what everyone will think. I ought to have known—after all those years. But it was just that it had gone on so long—I was confused. I lost my judgment. I don't think I'm fit for love, Justine."

"Are any of us?" She sat back, brushing back her short hair with an impatient hand. "Does Baise know yet?"

"Yes. I told him last night—at least that it must be postponed. I haven't been over to the farm lately. And so he comes here, so punctually, so regularly." She smiled tragically to herself. "Poor Baise——"

"How did he take it, Claire?"

"Well—as Baise would. I think he understood—better than anyone."

She hadn't wanted him to understand. His blindness had made her feel that she must be very, very chivalrous. She mustn't read the guilt that he had no eyes to hide from her. He had asked her—almost eagerly, "Are you frightened again?" And she had said, "Yes—a little. Perhaps it always will be like

that." She had so wanted to make it easy for him. But of course that wasn't possible. He would have no pity on himself. He would suffer terribly. Unless she could make him believe that it was all her fault—that she didn't love him. She had tried. She had said: "I'm not worthy of you. I think I haven't any real heart."

It was funny that she should have to say that—just when it wasn't true any more.

In the end he had tried to seem both patient and impatient with her.

"Well, I am accustomed to waiting, Claire."

That undertone of relief. She could hear it now like a knell ringing in her ears. And yet he had looked so utterly broken.

Justine stood up. She spoke abruptly, as though she were forcing herself.

"After I left the meet I rode over to see poor old Powell. He's back, you know. We heard last night. They brought him down in an ambulance. He wanted to come home."

"Poor little Alfred!"

"He asked to see me. I've been with him all this time."

"Did he tell you about Gale?"

"Yes, they saw each other. Gale's living with some woman."

"Justine, doesn't that hurt?"

"Of course—of course—— It's so mad—so pathetic—the whole business——"

"Sometimes I think we ought not to love each other," Claire said strangely; "that we do each other a great unkindness."

She walked with Justine to the gate where Justine's mare stood tethered. She watched Justine mount. She had always been frightened of horses. But Justine looked beautiful as a young man on horseback. It was impossible to believe that life could beat her.

"Powell is dying," she said. "They think he won't last the night. Such a jangle of discords that he's resolved somehow into harmony. He's happy, Claire."

The older woman laid her hand on the mare's golden neck. She forgot that she was frightened.

"Justine, tell Jane, will you—I mean, about Baise. Tell her that it's all over—that it's my fault and that I don't really care."

They regarded each other steadily. For the first time in their lives they met on equal ground. But in the end Claire coloured and turned away as though she were ashamed of the passionate respect in her sister's eyes.

"So that's how it is," Justine muttered. "I half guessed."

"Don't say anything, will you? Please don't think about it. I'm older. I've missed happiness. I don't deserve it any more. I can do without it—but Baby Jane——"

"Oh, damn Baby Jane—damn everyone!"

She swung her horse about. She couldn't bear even to say good-bye.

2

Justine walked her horse sorrowfully homeward. There was too much unhappiness. It was like a terrible sickness of the soul. The outward conditions of existence weren't bad. It was a lovely world. The acts of God were relatively merciful. But people tore themselves and each other to pieces. For all their mechanical devices by which they endeavoured to control their destiny they seemed tragically incapable of adjusting themselves to life, they seemed unfit to live. And only when they were near death, as Alfred Powell was, did they attain peace.

Poor little Alfred! He hadn't said much—hadn't been able to. He had just held her hand and looked at her. She had known quite well what was in his heart, but he hadn't tried to plead. His face, with the approach of death, had been stripped of its grotesqueness as a face is stripped of a mask, and was composed and satisfied. At parting she had kissed him. And then he had spoken clearly, with a faint metallic ring in his voice like the notes of a distant trumpet.

" 'Now as through a glass, darkly; but then face to face.' " He smiled at her. "You and Gale must see each other. You must not have to die to know—as Margaret knows."

Poor little Powell! Such a sentimentalist, even in death! He didn't know Nat was landing at Southampton next month. Thank God, he would be well out of it all by then. It would be too bad if at the end he should have to witness the dissolution of all his fairy stories. If there was a life hereafter Justine supposed that it would enable him to obtain some sort of intelligible survey of the apparently unintelligible mess that he had left behind him. He had already a look of wisdom.

He had seen Gale. And Gale was living with some woman. What a grim gesture! Justine wondered about her. How would she fill the place that she, Justine, had relinquished? With patience, with dignity, with love perhaps? (But these were not enough.) Powell had said she was some sort of a peasant. So that she wouldn't have to think. She would be too busy baking and mending and cooking for him. If there had been only that much to do; if Gale had come home crippled and destitute so that she could have gone out and fought for them both—carried on a war of her own—she too might have endured decently. There would have been some personal dignity to uphold her. But from the War, with its sheer hard work, its glamour of altruism and self-sacrifice, they had both been flung back into the emptiness of their old lives. And the pleasant places where they had dwelt before in gracious self-satisfaction had become barren and unendurable. Even Gale's work had been part of an arid make-believe. He didn't come of a money-making class. He had had money too long to really need it or believe in it. If they had given him some fine task that would have stripped him to the bone financially and physically, he too might have found peace. But the War once over, there was no use for the heroic temper. The two of them—among millions—had rotted in emptiness, their eyes turned inward on their own personal disaster, watching it become gangrenous.

Well, it was too late to see where they might have saved themselves. The game was over. As Baise said so often, they hadn't even been told the rules. So it wasn't strange that they had made such a mess of it. Still, it was piteous enough to wash out every trace of rancour. She had blamed Gale bitterly. But this morning she wanted to tell him that she understood.

Even that night at the Chelsea Arts. Perhaps if she hadn't run into Nat's arms five minutes after that frantic, unforgivable outbreak—— But there Destiny had taken a hand. And Nat hadn't changed. He had no need to change. He was so well adjusted to life that he had taken the War in his stride. He had enjoyed it. He had wanted Justine more than he had ever wanted anything, but he had done without her and had had a good time and made a success of things. She hadn't really hurt him at all. He had just waited. And now the waiting was nearly over. The certainty was in his eyes—in the very clasp of his hand.

In the old days in Madrid she had been frightened of his desire. To her dreaming adolescence it had seemed a brutal, destructive force. Now it gave her a queer sensation of relief. It was as though she had come out of a dark confused place of torment into clear, crude sunlight. All that she could hope from life now was life itself. And Nat was part of life. He was the epitome of the norm—as direct and uncomplicated as hunger.

She had been reckless that night. The inflamed, unnatural gaiety about her, and her own anger and misery, had driven her to lengths of self-revelation that no subsequent withdrawal had made good. She had surrendered a key into Nat's hand that he refused like a coolly amused brigand to give back to her.

They had danced. It was a wild business. All the forces of disintegration had been deliberately let loose. Men and women were breaking under the pressure. Their painted faces were ghastly with grins of astonishment at the dissolution that was going on within themselves. In the midst of them Nat alone seemed to retain his integrity. His passions were too strong,

too purposeful for dissipation. Justine found herself holding fast to him. He talked to her as though they were in an ordinary ballroom.

"Aren't you happy?"

"No, of course not. Who is?"

"I am. And you could be."

"What gives you that illusion?"

"I have always known it. But you must seek happiness where it is to be found."

"And where is that, O Wise Man from the East?"

"I could give it you. I could have given it to you years ago, but you were too young to understand. You are still a few days too young. But you are growing up fast. You are almost wise enough."

Later on he drove her home. It was raining dismally. Justine looked out of the window. Her heart was full of an intolerable disgust. The very streets had the gray, soiled look of sick, exhausted debauchery. She had a vision of Gale wandering about them like a lost soul cast into outer darkness. But she couldn't pity him. He had put himself beyond the reach of pity. He had stamped on the face of all decent feeling.

Nat didn't make love to her. He was very silent. But she knew all that he wanted her to know. His self-control, which was part of the deep, strong tide of his virility, was more dangerous to her than any outburst. She was sick of frustrated emotion and his unhurt self-confidence rested and released her. She felt as though he were drawing her out of a rank backwater to meet a splendid forthright adventure of the senses. His was no false idealism. They were man and woman. That was the first thing and the last in their relationship. If he had known of it he would have regarded her conflict with Gale as an absurd farce. It was not much better. But he was never to know. It was enough that he knew she was unhappy.

Fundamentally, he had been hopelessly wrong, of course.

There was a side of life that he couldn't even see. (Therein lay some of his strength.) And there had been times when his self-confidence had seemed fatuous. It wasn't, in fact, wisdom that had driven her to his primitive conception of happiness as to a last refuge. It was despair. But this much at least was true—she was no longer frightened by it. She accepted it. And so inevitably she accepted him. She grew to need him. She came to sun herself like a beaten and starved animal in the steady heat of his direct passion. She felt sometimes that she had been living in a madhouse peopled with mad, tormented visions till she had become almost mad herself, and that Nat had opened the gates to a sane and normal world.

She had resisted him. Indeed, he did not want her except on his own terms. He had a conventional contempt for intrigue. But apart from his deliberate purpose there was something in her that still fought on the side of the maimed soul that she was deserting. She did not love Gale any more. But she had a stark integrity that made it difficult for her to surrender what had become a post of honour. That last night before Nat sailed had been also the last night of her resistance. To his pleading she had offered a stubbornly reiterated, "There are things one can't do—that aren't civilized." It seemed to her that the Green Park where they had walked backward and forward must be haunted by the echo of that desperate battle cry. She had almost broken his patience. But at the last moment, under the lamplight, she knew that she had betrayed herself. He had gone away satisfied.

It was just as well that Gale had broken out as he did. It made an end. It spared them both one more shameful reconciliation.

Justine stroked her horse's neck absently. This time next month it would be all over. One half of her life would be cut off and set adrift to be forgotten. Nat would make her whole and well again. She made a picture of herself living in some

country house with Nat and their children and their dogs. They would have excellent servants. Their lives would be dignified and gracious. In the winter they would hunt; in the spring they would come up to town for the season. They would travel a little. But in the autumn they would always be back in time for the shooting in Scotland. And of course they would have occupations that accorded with their traditions of responsibility. The scandal would die down after a little and Nat would find an outlet for his soldierly zeal. Perhaps some command in the Territorials. And she would throw herself into politics—or some work of civic well-doing that would lend her life dignity and justification.

It was all so clear, so settled. Dignity and peace. The rounding-out of herself as a human being functioning normally in the scheme of things. No more struggle. No more battling with phantoms. She could let the reins lie loose on her horse's neck and be carried home.

There was a man standing under the trees just ahead of her. His attitude seemed more familiar to her than the man himself. It was as though a ghost of a secret grief within her own heart had risen to haunt her.

It was Baise. She wondered what he was doing, standing midway between Whiteladies and Claire's cottage—like a blind man who had lost his way. As she came level with him he lifted his face inquiringly. Its haggard wretchedness closed her lips. She was cutting herself loose from the tangled misery of life. She rode on in unrecognizing silence.

3

Jane came out of the fields by the broken hedge. Her dark hair was swept back from her forehead. She looked like a hunted nymph, her young face flushed with distress and shame. Baise couldn't see all that. He could only feel the hand thrust fiercely into his, holding him fast.

"I saw Justine coming—I ran and hid. I didn't want her to guess—to have to tell lies——"

"So it was Justine," he muttered with his blind face to the road.

"Yes. She must have passed you. Didn't she speak to you?"

"No. I just heard a horse go by."

"How strange! Why didn't she?"

"I don't know. It was queer—I felt as though someone I cared about had cut me dead."

"Oh, Baise—she couldn't——"

"But she did."

"Why did she?"

"I think she knows," he said. "Claire must have told her."

"Claire——? But Claire doesn't know——"

"Something—everything."

"What makes you imagine—we've been so careful."

"We've been reckless—reckless inside ourselves. That's all that matters. That's what people see—when they care enough."

"But Claire doesn't care—not really—not as we do."

"Somehow—I think she does—now."

"Baise—it can't be—it mustn't be—it's too cruel."

He pressed her hand against his breast.

"I know."

"Can't we sit down? Must we walk about like this—like strays—with nowhere to rest? I feel so tired; I feel as I did when I was a little girl and was frightened—as though I were going to be sick."

"Yes—all right. I don't think it matters any more what we do. Let's sit down under the hedge—where the sun is. If people think we're hiding, it doesn't matter either. Because we're not—we've nothing left to hide."

"Darling, you're hurt—you're hurt all over. It's Justine. What right had she to do that? Who is she to sit in judgment? She's torn Gale's life to pieces. She's been unfaithful and unkind——"

"I don't think she meant to judge. I think she was too unhappy. That's how it was. Don't you see—she'd just come from Claire, and Claire has told her things we don't know."

"But there isn't anything——"

"Yes, there is. I've felt it for a long time. She's been different. She doesn't come to the farm any more. I've had to come to her. Darling, she was like a bird that I held in my hand and which was becoming tame and happy. Sometimes I thought she was going to sing with happiness. And now—well, it's all gone. She's frightened again. No, it's not even fear. It's as though just when she was trusting me most I'd let her go—I had driven her off into the wilderness."

"Baise, you mustn't, you've done nothing——"

"Oh, my dear, how can we say that?"

"I mean—it's just—we couldn't help ourselves."

"Perhaps we couldn't. If we were sure—— I've puzzled and worried over that. I can't believe that this has happened. And yet it has happened."

"We didn't want it—no, indeed we didn't."

"We cheat ourselves all the time. But I think that's true. We didn't want it. It came on us—like a force outside."

"No—in us—deep in us."

"It was like—being overwhelmed by life itself. I'd given up things. I'd made up my mind that I couldn't have them. I wasn't young any more. I couldn't expect to feel like a young man—not the—you know, the glory of being alive—of being in love. That was all spent. I loved Claire with the deep quiet of myself—all that was left of me."

She covered her face with her hands.

"You still do."

"Yes—I suppose I do. I wouldn't feel this—this being torn to pieces—if I didn't. I'd be terribly sorry about it, but I'd feel in a way that it couldn't be helped. When people can't love each other any more it's like an act of God. It's better to face it

honestly. But when they go on loving each other and life makes them do such damnable, cruel things——"

"Oh, Baise, what have I done to you?"

"You're my youth, Baby Jane. You've come to me like—like—oh, God help me—like a spring wind bringing back all the old sweetness of things."

She shook him by the arm.

"We mustn't talk like that. It's no use. We've got to be practical. We've so little time. It's as though the ship were burning under our feet. We must think what we're going to do—quick. We've got to be decent."

"It isn't altogether in our hands."

"What do you mean? Claire——?"

"She knows. She pretends she doesn't. She wants to make it easy for me. She's put off our marriage—just as a blind—to make me think it's—it's—well, her old fear of love—that she can't really care enough——"

"She didn't. She never cared. She's wasted your life—your poor youth——"

"I think she feels that. It's her sense of justice."

"But it's true. Claire's cold—cold as ice; she's never loved anyone—not even you."

"I wish I could be sure of that."

"I wonder——"

"What do you wonder?"

"If you really wish—oh, but that's too deep—I shall be lost. Oh, my darling, please tell me that you love me."

"I do. You know it—you must feel it."

"I can only feel you suffering. It makes me furious to think how much you've suffered."

"It's been my fault."

"It's always our fault. But we're so innocent. We don't want to make mistakes. We don't want to do harm. I don't. I've always thought—well, there's one thing I can be. I can be decent. I won't hurt people."

"It's like a curse on us—not being able to help ourselves."

"Now—now—we're getting away from things. We're funking them. And I can be brave, darling. That's another thing I've always had in my mind. Sometimes I've been frightened of life—feeling how helpless we were—just like wretched little flies in the hands of a God who took pleasure in pulling off our wings and our legs. But then I thought, if I'm brave, if He can't make me whimper or ask for mercy, I'll have the laugh on Him in the end. I'll be bigger than He is."

"Darling, darling little Jane—I can't bear to hear you talk like that."

"But it's true, isn't it? It's all we've really got—our courage, our dignity. It's something we've torn from God when He wasn't looking—when He was despising us too much to notice. And now He can't take it away from us. It's what we've got to hold onto."

"Claire is holding onto it, too."

"But for Claire it's all right. She *can't* know. She's just—just wobbling—as she has always done."

"Not now. She's never been like this before. She's very strong. It's as though she had come down into the arena for the first time and were fighting. Not for happiness. I think she's stronger than either of us."

"You must make her believe——"

"I can't. I've tried. It's no good. I feel my untruth withering under her truth. If one could tell everything—but one can't. No one would believe it. We have such fixed ideas about ourselves—even though we all know in our hearts that they aren't true. We daren't give them up. It would mean giving up our rights over each other."

"You mean—our possessorship?"

"Yes, I think I mean that. We want to possess each other utterly—though we know that we ourselves can't be utterly possessed. We want everything—so that we daren't let ourselves realize that we don't give everything."

"Claire didn't give you everything—she never can."

"No, never."

"And you can't give her everything—or me. You love Claire, too."

"I wouldn't have dared tell you that, for fear I'd lose you."

"I'd give you everything—my soul, my body—my last thought. But then, I'm young. I can't be sure. There might come a time when everything living and growing in me would want to move on—however much I loved and needed you."

"I know. And I couldn't face it, I couldn't share you."

"I can't share you. And Clare can't. We're not just—not reasonable. That is one of the cruellest things that God has done to us: He has made it impossible for us to live at peace with ourselves."

"Perhaps we'll work through somehow, some day, to freedom——"

"Oh, Baise, we're just talking, talking. I'll have to go home to lunch. Isn't that stupid—to lunch! And we've got to do something—settle something——"

"I don't know. I have a feeling it's all done—all settled. Claire has settled in her own mind——"

"She has set you free."

"Yes, it amounts to that."

"Perhaps she can't; perhaps that's beyond her power, too."

"We've got to come out into the open, Jane, got to be honest. We owe her that much."

"Yes—Claire and I—it's more important for us than for you. We're sisters. We used to love each other. We do now. When we were kids we played together. She was so much older—always looking after me—trying to play my games. Oh, Baise, why do we have to grow up? It was so lovely."

"Sweetheart, it will be lovely again."

"Yes, it must—mustn't it? You're free. Claire wants you to be free. And we love each other. We've just got to be patient and wait—till things heal a little."

"That's it. Just wait."

"Oh, waiting—waiting! You've done nothing else."

"It's all right. It's one of the blessings of growing older—one can wait."

"We've got to be happy. It's no use our all being unhappy, is it? Claire wouldn't want it. I wouldn't. I've got to think of it like that—in her place I'd want us to be happy."

"I think she does."

"If you knew how you looked. Oh, Baise, I'll make up to you; I'll make you glad somehow. This is just a dreadful pain. It can't last forever." She leaned against his shoulder. Her clasp of his hand had become desperate. "But I've got to cry—just this once—hard. I promise—I'll never, never cry again."

IX

1

Old Luis, the rope maker, was dying. The fever that skulked about the village, garroting one after another, had caught him, and he had not fought against it. Vicente, his young nephew, had been killed in the bullring two weeks before and he didn't want to live. He was happy to die.

María held the candle above his head and the light fell on the face of the Virgin and her Child whom they had brought in to comfort Luis in his extremity. For they remembered how he had loved and faithfully served her. It had been his duty, ever since he was a young man, to keep her jewels bright and her silver dress clean and shining, and he had never failed. And he had never married. It was as though he had felt himself dedicated. So now two little boys had brought her down from her throne among the gold clouds and had set her on a low table where she and Luis could see each other. She did not need her gold clouds, for she shone with a soft white radiance of her own. There was a touching simplicity about her loveliness set against the background of the austere white wall. She was a queen who had come to say good-bye to a loyal servant, and she had put away her splendour and her aloof wisdom. She bent toward him, murmuring confidentially. Even the grave child with his two lifted fingers seemed to smile down on him.

Pepe, in a torn and dirty cotta, held the Blessed Oil, and Father Valeza anointed the dying eyes—

"Through this holy unction and His most tender mercy may

the Lord pardon thee whatever sins thou hast committed with thy sight. Amen."

The door of the room stood open, letting in a feeble breath of air. From where he lay Luis could have seen the faces of the villagers come and go in silent procession. They were not distressed or frightened or curious. They were his friends and fellow Christians who were going with him to the frontiers. But in the wonder of his adventure he had forgotten them.

Don Cristóbal stood at the foot of the neat white bed. He was in full armour, but Gale held his sword for him, because Don Cristóbal himself was old and feeble and it was difficult for him to stand so long under the heavy burden.

"May the Lord pardon thee whatsoever sins thou hast committed with thy hands."

There was a great tenderness in all that Father Valeza did. It was as though his unbelief recognized in these last grave gestures of forgiveness and farewell the shadow of all human longing. And so there was a compassion and dignity about him that filled the dim room with reconciliation. Even between him and his old enemy there was peace.

The end was very near now. Old Luis was dying as quietly as he had lived, his hands crossed over his breast as though he were trying to save everyone trouble. Don Cristóbal saluted him and then bent down and kissed him on either cheek.

"Go in peace, old soldier. We have held the fort. Be assured that we shall hold it to the end."

Old Luis smiled faintly.

"Good-bye, Excellency, it was an honour—to serve under you."

Gale kissed him, too. He had been a friendly old man—simple and kindly, thinking no evil. And in a way Gale knew that he had killed Vicente when he had killed his faith in his own courage.

"Good-bye—forgive me."

But Luis, with his head turned a little on the pillow, smiled past him into the Virgin's quiet face.

Gale went out into the hot night. The villagers made respectful room for him and he walked on alone to the ramparts. He felt tired and ill and at peace. For the last week he and Don Cristóbal and Valeza and María had fought the fever. They had gone from house to house, and where the men were stricken they had done the work of men, and where the women were stricken they had done the work of women. It had been a strange business—Don Cristóbal fighting as a soldier fights the machinations of a mortal enemy and Father Valeza praying night and day to a Virgin he didn't believe in. And yet there had been a sort of truth behind it all.

From where he waited Gale could hear the dull intermittent stroke of a hammer. They were making old Luis's coffin. The dying, forgiven ears would hear the sound and recognize it without fear. These people were not afraid of death. Gale, who had broken through their armour, had found both their tenderness and their dark, unquestioning awareness of unseen things.

Valeza stood beside him.

"It is all over."

"May he rest in peace," Gale said.

"He will do that—indeed I think so. Go home now, señor. You have done enough. Even Don Cristóbal can do no more. He could hardly stand, poor soul. María had to help him like a sick child."

"Yes, I must go back," Gale said.

"And Chiquita——?"

"She is better. She will get well—for a little time. She isn't to be spared anything. She must die as she lived."

"You have been good to her, señor."

"I have been good to nobody, Father."

Valeza looked out silently across the dark invisible sea. At last he spoke with a kind of muffled anguish:

"I feel so much alone. And in my loneliness I have begun to trouble over many things. I have thought—since all this sickness and death have come to my poor people—that indeed there may be some Power that is taking vengeance on me. Does it seem to you, señor, that I have done such evil?"

Gale shook his head.

"No, no, I think we are all greatly to be pitied, Father."

"That is what I have felt—great pity. To those who love much, much shall be forgiven. God, if He exists, planted this passion in my heart. If it has become a consuming passion surely He will have mercy."

"Indeed I think so, Father."

Valeza sighed faintly.

"Good-night, señor."

"Good-night."

Gale went on alone down the white road. At the village gateway Pepe overtook him, flying like a bat through the dark. But as he came up alongside he assumed a bearing of more than usual reserve. He had discarded his ragamuffinly vestments but not the dignity of office. Gale took him by the hand. The relief of its cool freshness made him feel suddenly childishly light-hearted.

"All right, Chiko? No pains anywhere? No headache, no sore throat?"

"No, señor. Every year the fever comes to the village, but not to me. I am very strong. Besides, I don't think the Virgin wants me."

"You served her very well to-night, Pepe."

"Well, Juan was ill. Someone had to take his place. But after all she is only a silver statue."

"That may be a great deal."

"What may it be?"

"Beauty."

"Yes, she is beautiful. She was beautiful to-night. But she couldn't help old Luis."

"You can't tell."

"But you're a heretic, señor. You don't believe in her."

"I don't disbelieve any more in anything that men believe in, Pepe. It isn't wise."

"Do you think I ought to believe in her, señor?"

"I think," said Gale solemnly, "that you ought to wash your face. The last time I saw it, it was extremely dirty."

Pepe piped a decorous laugh. The Señor often made him laugh. Besides, he was really happy now. He and the Señor were no longer outcasts. Even Leah, battered and lame and more unlovely than ever, had become part of the legitimate scheme of things. And Chiquita, please God, would die soon.

The hut door stood open and by the light of a candle that had been nailed in a crude bracket to the wall, Pepe could see Chiquita lying in the rough wooden bed that Gale had made for her. Pepe didn't go in. He set about building a fire outside and getting supper. He was proud of his usefulness. And besides, the Señor looked very tired and Pepe was afraid for him.

Chiquita was asleep. With her black hair plaited neatly about her head and the lids of her eyes closed, she lay under the shadow of a lost beauty. Gale stood beside her and after a moment her eyes opened and met his. Gale smiled down at her. It wouldn't matter any more however much she pretended to hate him. He had seen her thankfulness.

"How are you, Chiquita?"

"Better. I shan't die this time. I've been up and about. Then I got tired. To-morrow I shall be well again."

"You must take things easy."

"You were gone a long time," she muttered.

"I'm sorry. I couldn't help it. There was so much to do. Theresa is ill now—and the three children——"

"And Luis——?"

"He is dead."

"He is lucky."

He did not answer. He fetched water from the earthen pitcher outside the door and, putting his arm round her shoulders, helped her to drink. With a moistened cloth he washed away the sweat of breaking fever from her eyes and forehead. He guessed that she was strong enough to help herself but that it pleased her to be so gently handled. For a week he had nursed her, fighting her resentment and hostility to the verge of delirium. Then she had broken down, and, though she maintained her sullen bearing of distrust, she had submitted unprotestingly to his care of her.

She felt his hand.

"You are burning hot. It may be that it is your turn."

"Perhaps. You'd be rather glad, wouldn't you?"

"Why should I be glad?"

"You'd have me in your power."

She smiled grimly.

"Would you be afraid?"

"No."

"Not of death?"

"I'd worry about you and Pepe and Leah."

"We're strays. We'd take care of ourselves."

He began tidying up the sparsely furnished room, and presently she called to him and he came and sat beside her on the one chair that Goana had left them. He was glad of the excuse to sit down, for he could hardly stand. For a while she did not speak to him but her thin brown hand, which had retained a pathetic youthfulness, lay on the blanket, and moved by he knew not what impulse he covered it with his own. Their eyes met again. In hers was amusement and irony and astonishment.

"Why do you do that?"

"I don't know—I was thinking about people—about Luis——"

"—that I was going to die, eh?"

"About death," he said.

"You've seen a lot of death. You were in that War they talk about. Death shouldn't worry you."

"That wasn't the same. It seemed almost as though we had chosen to die, of our own free wills."

"Were you hurt?"

"Yes."

"Badly?"

"It would make you laugh, Chiquita, if I told you how badly."

"I am not given to laughter."

"No—you are hurt, too."

She was silent a moment, gazing fixedly into the shadow. Her hand had not moved.

"I heard them talk about you—up there in the *fonda*. Did you marry the woman who took Goana's sheep away from him?"

"Yes."

"Were you happy?"

"I don't know, Chiquita. It's as though you asked me about my life. Was it happy or unhappy? I don't know. The loveliest and the saddest things were so interwoven with each other."

"Is she dead?"

"No."

"You talked as though one of you were dead."

"I am—in a way."

"You met her here—in Goana's hut. Is that why you've come back?"

"I don't know."

"And I don't need to ask." She tried to pull her hand away, but he held fast to it as though he were frightened and dared not let her go. She demanded for the hundredth time, "What do you want of me?" And he answered as he had done before. But this time he added with a kind of humility "—except that we should befriend each other."

She laughed to herself.

"Befriend me! That would be something new if it were true."

"It is true. Perhaps it wasn't true before. It is now."

"What has happened to you?"

"I don't know." He felt that he was speaking like a child, puzzled but without subterfuge or self-defence, from his heart. "I don't know, Chiquita. But something is happening to me."

"It's the fever," she muttered. "It makes us light-headed. I imagined that I was a girl and that Pascual was taking me away to marry me."

"Why didn't he?"

"It was his people. I wasn't good enough. Perhaps he would have married me in the end. But he died."

Pepe came in, bearing their supper on a wooden platter. Solemnly he gave a bowl of soup to the woman and to Gale, and then with his own bowl perched himself on a stool at Gale's feet. Leah, limping a little, crept in and lay with her nose between her paws, watching them.

They sat in silence. The dim light made their faces look like the faces of saints in a carved altarpiece—grave and dignified. It was like a communion. Gale felt his throat tighten. These were his people. They were the tragic counter-parts of the dreams that he and Justine had dreamed together before the fire. He loved her. Nakedly and desperately, without hatred or anger, he loved her. There was a moment when in his tired and feverish confusion he saw Pepe as her son and Chiquita as Justine herself grown old and sad and suffering. He could have knelt, hiding his face against her breast, so strong was the illusion.

It passed. But he was glad of the half-darkness. For he knew that Chiquita watched him and that she would have seen that in his heart he was crying bitterly.

2

They carried old Luis out of the dark church into the blinding midday sunlight. The six-pointed star and the thirteen little

figures in the tympanum who had seen him pass under them seventy years ago as a crying baby bade him good-bye. The cock on the pointed arch crew loudly, but not because old Luis had been unfaithful.

Pepe led the procession, staggering under the big black crucifix, then came the coffin with the sable and silver pall, carefully draped by Pedro Beiza so that no one should see the hole that the rats had eaten, and the four pallbearers with the sweat running down their dark faces. There were two little boys swinging their censers, and the sweet-scented smoke made a cloud in which Father Valeza walked with his hands clasped upon his breast and his lips compressed prayerlessly. Don Cristóbal and María and Gale walked together. Don Cristóbal clung to Gale's arm, for now he was only a feeble old man whose friend preceded him to their last resting place. The armies of the Emir had withdrawn, waiting for nightfall. Behind them came Balthazar leading a handful of villagers. In silence, save for the shuffling of feet through the thick white dust, they made their way to the high ground of the cemetery.

There the open grave awaited them. There was no wind. The air shimmered with heat. The sky was like a brazen shield. Gale stood bareheaded facing the mountains. He heard Father Valeza's voice from afar off and the soft sinister rattle of falling earth and stones. And it seemed to him that for a moment he was lifted out of the midst of them and saw the whole of life stretched at his feet.

He thought, "If it were Justine——" And it came to him that he must tell her quickly that she must never die—not, at least, until he was safely dead. Because, for all their bitterness against each other, the world would be too empty. And besides, there was something that he had to tell her. He didn't know what it was yet, for the terrible noise of the light confused him and his head hurt intolerably. But it had to do with Pepe and Chiquita and Leah and this old man lying under the red earth. They were fragments of a secret that he was painfully piecing

together, and when it was complete he would show it to Justine.

He could hardly stand. His knees gave under him as El Grande's had done that night when they had fought together. His body was tinder that had caught fire under a red-hot ray of sunlight and was burning up. His eyes blazed with heat and his tongue curled up in his mouth like a scorched leaf. He felt Balthazar touch him on the arm. Balthazar saw what was happening. He was afraid lest Gale should set fire to the rest of the people.

"Come, señor."

Then the two of them went on a pilgrimage together. They were expiating their sins, Gale explained. The pavement of purgatory was made of white scorching stones and the air of dust and the sky of molten steel.

"How long does it last—a thousand years?" Gale asked.

"Only a little way now, señor."

"Well—it shouldn't be far. It isn't as though we knew what we were up to, most of the time. We make mistakes and, believe me, we pay for them—we pay for them on the spot, Balthazar."

The big Balthazar was almost carrying him. It seemed that there were shrines by the wayside—kind of spiritual inns run by saints where the tormented souls could find respite. And Chiquita and Balthazar were holy people. Gale hadn't noticed before that the Virgin and Chiquita were so like each other. Every minute he expected Chiquita to glide up and take her place in a nimbus of golden cloud. As to Balthazar, he might be Peter or Paul—anyway, a fighter of some sort—not John, of course. Gale was very glad he had found this out about the two of them, because he knew that Pepe and Leah and the stray curs he was leaving behind him would be taken care of. He asked Chiquita to tell Justine that he knew how it had all happened.

And Balthazar grumbled and swore.

"If only the accursed rain would come!"

It was strange to be undressed by saints, to have the strong Peter undo your collar and the Virgin unwind the tapes of

your *alpargatas* from your burning feet. Though when you remembered that the saints were given to such things—washing the sores of lepers and sharing their mantles with the destitute —it seemed natural enough. Gale was very grateful. He didn't mind yielding his poor maimed body to them. Since they were saints they already knew how he had suffered. They who had endured so much humiliation would not humiliate him.

Then Gale went on his pilgrimage alone. It was a painful business—full of a terrible heat and tumult. The long road took him through familiar places that yet seemed strange and frightening to him as though they had been distorted by some evil enchantment. It brought him at last to a child's room with animals painted on the walls. He remembered that once they had been friendly, amusing creatures, but now they leered and winked at him hideously and he closed his eyes to escape from them. His mother stood beside his white bed. He didn't want to see her, either. For he had done wrong. He had made her despise him and he wanted to sink through into the blackest depths beyond the reach of her contempt. But after all it wasn't his mother. The walls of the little room melted into a wide spaciousness and the animals became the cries of men in torment. And it was Justine who stood there. He had fallen asleep waiting for her, and in his sleep his pillow had become the soft broken body of a dead German and the horror of it had wakened him. He knew it was Justine. Her presence was like a warm light falling across his face. But he dared not look at her. Because of something that fellow Elliot had told him he was ashamed again. He remembered what it was, and the blood rushed up into his face, betraying him.

A parody of a man. Something that made beastly people snigger. He had come back to her like that. It was cowardly. He ought to have died decently as the German had done. But he hadn't known. And now it was too late. It was of no use funking it. His eyes opened and he saw her. They looked

straight at each other. He thought that in his life he would never see anything more noble than her face. She knelt. She gathered him in her arms. The sweet odour of her tired, anguished body encompassed him with peace. So they held each other for a long while. And he knew that it was all right. Among the millions who had loved and been loved he had been spared to live out his days with her. It was enough. Nothing else mattered to either of them.

But they tried hard to keep very still lest a rough movement should loosen that precarious hold.

And he couldn't keep still. That was the whole disaster—even though he knew how dangerous it was. His body was on fire. And for all his desperate efforts he twisted himself free from her. She couldn't keep him. She was melting away with the rest of life. Her tragic face changed. The features grew blurred—merged into other features. It was as though a photographer were playing ghoulish tricks with pictures of different people—superimposing them upon each other. And when he had finished his trick Gale saw that it was Chiquita who was bending over him and that her strange tears were on his hand.

X

1

Difficult things were happening to Elizabeth Lindesfarne's children. She felt their distress. She could not understand it. There was Jane with her wan, desperate youth, and Claire, silent and pale and compassionate, and between the two of them a shadow that made them treat each other like people in the presence of death. And now Justine was going to this man. She wasn't even running away. She was going to him deliberately and openly. The Lindesfarnes' car stood at the door waiting to take her. Her luggage had gone yesterday. This conventional, matter-of-fact acceptance of what seemed to Elizabeth Lindesfarne an undisciplined and outrageous act offended her deeply. Besides, she had loved Gale after her composed fashion. And she loved Justine. They had at least one quality in common, and she could not believe that that quality could survive what Justine was doing.

She sat writing by her table at the window, indifferent to the strong, revealing light, and wearing the horn-rimmed spectacles with the courage of her complete rightness. She was poised in the middle of a sentence to Claire—

"—Jane is going down to Whiteladies to-morrow——"

Justine stood at her elbow. They did not know how to say what they had to say to each other. Elizabeth Lindesfarne understood suffering; but she did not understand confusion. Life might be painful—it had hurt her profoundly—but at least it was quite simple. A well-bred woman had no alternatives.

"There are things one cannot do, Justine," she said at last.

"When you have found out that for yourself you will be brave enough to come back."

She sat with an erectness that was not youthful. Rather her straight, firm shoulders were a mature and conscious response to experience. They made Justine feel suddenly ravaged and disruptive and indecent.

"I'm going to burn my boats," she said, "just to make sure I can't."

"That seems to me very cowardly. I don't know why you should have to do it. You are not a coward."

"I suppose we are all cowards—in spots."

Elizabeth Lindesfarne did not think so. But it was of no use discussing such a subject. She wrote: "I am glad. She seems fretted and worn out. I wanted her to stay with you but she prefers to be alone. And of course she will have you and Baise near at hand. If you can, try and find out what is the matter with her. She may tell you——"

Justine read the last line. At first it seemed to her rather sad. And then she realized that it was because their mother could never understand the unhappiness of her children that she had become for them a centre of repose and stability. She bent and kissed the cool, withered cheek.

"Good-bye, darling Elizabeth."

It was less than the vibration of a taut wire—an almost imperceptible tremor. Perhaps Elizabeth had often trembled like that and had gone on talking and smiling and no one had ever known. No one must know now. In payment for a moment's weak intimacy they would lose the deeper understanding of each other's reticence.

Mrs. Lindefarne said "Good-bye," composedly, without looking up.

Clive Lindesfarne had been waiting in the hall, and he linked his arm through Justine's and went with her to the waiting car.

"Keep in touch with us, dear."

"Of course. But I won't come back—not till everything is over and forgotten."

"That won't be long—these days. If things don't go as you think they're going, trust us."

"I do. It will be all right, though."

"I don't know. I feel in a fog about you all. It's all very well for Elizabeth. This being modern is no joke—what with the things you can't do and the things you can't do without. I'm modern myself—at least, modern enough to want you to be happy any way you can manage it," he sighed, "so long as you do manage it."

He stood on the pavement with his hands thrust in the pockets of his coat and the wind ruffling his thick gray hair. As the car moved off he saluted her whimsically and sadly. He looked, she thought, more than ever like an old buccaneer. But this time he was being left in port by a younger and more reckless flyer of the *Jolly Roger*.

When Justine was out of sight he went in search of Justine's mother. He found her still at her table and still in the middle of a sentence to Claire. But she had taken off her glasses, and he knew that she could not see what she had written. She looked old and very beautiful. He took the pen from her stiff fingers and kissed them solemnly. For the first time in their lives she seemed to him pathetic. He knew that she was in dire need of him.

"You must just think," he said, "that she's all my fault."

She shook her head.

"You never did anything like this."

"I've had the devil's own luck, sweetheart." He laughed to himself. "I've had you."

But this was the kind of joke Elizabeth Lindesfarne did not care for. And she went on writing. . . .

Justine was going to meet Nat. It was really happening. Nat was arriving at Charing Cross—just as Gale had done that

day they had discharged him from the hospital and sent him home to her. That was on November 11, 1918. Justine remembered the day as gray and windless. Everything had been very quiet. The people on the streets had seemed to be walking carefully as though they were afraid of destroying the balance of some tremulous event. They knew what was coming, but they dared not believe. They couldn't talk about it or about anything. The whole city seemed to have fallen under a ban of silence. Justine climbed on the top of a bus. She wanted to be close to someone, and she sat down next a little man in a bowler hat. They did not look at each other. He sat there staring straight in front of him. The bus conductress came up and held out her hand absently. She let Justine's change scatter all over the floor.

"Gawd!" she said.

A policeman on a bicycle turned out of a side street. He was blowing a bugle. The familiar notes that had announced the close of how many nights of death and terror lifted splendidly in the gray stillness. It was the loveliest music.

"All clear, all clear!"

The man in the bowler hat turned to Justine. He was a plain, ordinary little fellow, and she never saw him again. But she felt that he and she would never forget each other.

"It's all over," he said.

And then they took each other's hands and both of them were crying. The bus conductress stood as though rooted to the spot, her loose Cockney mouth set in austere lines of resignation.

"All clear, all clear."

The bugle notes sounded far off and close at hand. They came hurrying down the streets like people in haste to join each other. The sirens answered, but as yet only timidly. For the bugle was an old and trusted herald who had right over them all. People came out of the houses and shops, and stood looking up at the sky as though they expected it to open and

give them back everyone they had lost. They spoke to each other gently and kindly. All the way to Charing Cross Justine looked down at them as on a people who beheld a vision. The light of it shone in their faces. By midday it was all over. They were frightened at their transfiguration and began to shout and tear their beauty to pieces. But for a little while a whole city had been beautiful.

Justine had arrived at the station too early. She stood on the platform in a dense crowd that was waiting for a leave-train to come in. She remembered the night she had come to see Gale off. Then everything had been quiet, muffled like a funeral drum. Now the people were trying to sing. They tried the old songs of 1914. But they couldn't do it. They weren't ready for that yet. They smiled at each other with blind eyes.

And then the train slid in along the platform, and doors flew open, discharging a tide of men. And there was Gale with fresh ribbons on his new uniform, and the fleeting look of a child who has suffered so much that it is afraid. She saw him before he saw her. She saw how hungrily he sought her—with what tragic timidity and doubt. She ran to him; she caught him by the arms and held him fast.

"Oh, Gale, my darling, well done, well done——"

It was absurd—so schoolgirlish, such a funny compromise between her reserve and her passionate pride in him. He was safe. He had won the War single-handed. He was her very own. She laughed to herself. The tears ran down her cheeks. And the eddying, excited crowd around laughed with her and patted them on the back, and, lifting Gale shoulder-high, they carried him cheering to the barriers. An untidy Cockney girl with her soldier's arm about her waist kissed Justine on the wet cheek.

"Ain't 'e fine, miss? You've got a fine young man. Your 'usband, ain't 'e?"

"Yes, he's my husband." Justine nodded.

"Well, we're getting spliced right off——"

They all shook hands. They had no knowledge of the lean, grim years to come. The gates of Eldorado stood open to a world of brothers.

Gale scrambled down from his living perch. She saw how the incident had reassured him. It was good to feel one's self carried by all this happiness and good will. They held close to each other. It was of no use worrying about Gale's kit. Gale said it was probably lost and a good thing too. They didn't care about anything; they didn't even know where they were going. They went, hand in hand, wherever the crowd took them, and at last they escaped, laughing and breathless, from the mad tide into a quiet square where there were benches under the trees. The trees were almost bare, but the red leaves made a warm carpet under their feet. They sat shoulder pressed against shoulder; it was unendurable not to feel each other. Neither of them thought of going home where Justine's people were waiting. They had to be alone. Not to talk. Not even to think. Just to be alone and quiet. It seemed to them now that the whole of these four years had been one gigantic effort and that they were tired out. They would want to rest a long time.

Some pigeons gathered at their feet. In the distance they could hear the scream of sirens and the muffled roar of a delirious city. But around them was peace and a soft contented crooning. Gale had taken off his cap and a pale sunlight fell on his thick, fair hair. He looked, she thought, very young. And there was a well-remembered quality to his youth that wrung her heart with love and pity for him. It had a close warm affinity with the earth—but with the earth in her most spiritual aspect, and for that reason profoundly moving and lovable—potentially tragic.

He spoke to her at last. And she realized how far his real self had been from their apparent happiness. There was something that had to be got over—cleared away between them—quickly, while they could endure it.

"You do love me, don't you, Justine? I mean—the real me—whatever that is—this——" He laid his hand against his breast. "I've got to know that—be sure of it. While I've been alone I've thought of nothing else. I've wanted you so terribly that sometimes I've felt I'd have to kill myself; there seemed no other way. Because I know I can't endure to lose you. I'd do something terrible if I lost you. And I don't want to—I want to be decent. I want you to be happy. It's no use our—our funking it. We've got to look things in the face. There are limits to endurance—yours and mine. We can't go through with it unless we love each other—more than anything in the world. You've got to love me"—he hesitated, and then added in a low voice—"more perhaps than I love you."

"I do," she answered soberly.

"I've got to know that now."

"You must know it——" She laid her hand on his. "Gale, I love the real, essential you, first and last for always. I couldn't live without you."

"Then nothing else matters."

"Nothing else."

The sunlight seemed to shine out of him. He pressed her hand against his mouth, against his eyes and forehead, as though it had the power to dispel the last image of distrust. The pigeons scattered with a whirr of wings.

"It's all right. I know you wouldn't tell me things that weren't true." He stood up. "Oh, Justine, let's go and be very, very happy. Let's go mad together, my darling."

They clung to each other. There was no one to see them. They laughed at themselves so that they should not cry. And presently when they were sober enough they fought their way to Justine's home in Lyall Street, and Gale invited everyone within hailing distance to a celebration feast, and made love to Elizabeth Lindesfarne, who bore with him with the not ill-pleased patience of a woman who has had to deal with such masculine absurdity all her life. And she and Justine felt very

close to each other because of this sober, wild young man whom they both loved.

For Gale didn't need to drink like the rest. It seemed to Justine that he and Baise were the only men in the furiously crowded restaurant, where Gale had miraculously obtained a table, who knew how to rejoice finely. Baise had come along too—because of Claire, of course—and Gale, who had never met him before, behaved like a loving elder brother, and described all the absurd things that people were doing and who they were and told funny ribald stories about them. And afterward he guided him through the wildly tossing mob in such a way that Baise could hardly have known he was being taken in hand. And Justine loved Gale as she had never loved him. There was something beautiful and chivalrous about his happiness.

At last they were alone together. They had gone to a little hotel off Dover Street until such time as Gale was demobilized and they could find a home for themselves. They were very tired—too tired. A street lamp threw a spot of white light on the ceiling. They were both looking up at it and in the midst of it their sad thoughts met together. It couldn't be helped. They couldn't escape. Memory clutched at their hearts. Never again would the circle of their love for each other be completed. Always it would be broken off, throwing them into confusion and frustrated anguish. They felt life waiting for them, biding its time, ironical and patient, just as it waited for the millions who, with the bitterness of aftermath already on their tongues, rioted through the streets. Life could afford to wait. For the first time Justine felt its shadow over them both, as threatening, in its way, as death had been.

Gale hadn't touched her. She stretched out her hand and took his, but even then he remained unresponsive, lost in the darkness of his own thoughts. He mumbled:

"After all—I'm just a cheat—I've cheated you out of everything——"

"You've given me everything," she answered steadily.

"You think so now. But it won't last—it can't. You're human —however magnanimous——"

And so she heard the first ominous note of the dread that was to sunder them. But at the moment she had not been really afraid. She had gathered together all the reserves of her pride, her conviction, and her love for him.

"I am not magnanimous," she answered. "I love you with all that I am. I ask nothing more but to be with you and to be loved by you. That is the simple truth."

And then gently but strongly she drew him into her arms. His head lay on her breast. She heard his soft, unhappy laugh.

"I'm the only child you'll ever have, poor sweetheart."

"You're all I want," she persisted steadily.

So she fought his grief, step by step. And presently he was at peace and, sighing deeply, fell asleep.

Charing Cross. The chauffeur touched his cap to her.

"Am I to wait, ma'am?"

"No, don't wait."

She could not believe in what was happening. She found it difficult to believe in her own reality. At any rate she couldn't help herself any more. Somewhere or other she had thrown away her power of directing her own destiny. A tide carried her. It was all right. She had chosen it, of course. Now it was too late. Even if she wanted to she couldn't turn back. Besides, probably she didn't want to. It was just this terrible confusion within herself—this inability to feel clearly, this sheer incredulity.

For it was incredible. It was incredible that she should have gone to meet Gale as she had done and that now she should be going to meet Nat. It was incredible that she should have said all that she had said to him, out of the profoundest conviction of which she was capable, and that it should have meant exactly nothing. Even if Gale had been dead it would

have been incredible. But he wasn't dead. He was alive. He was coming out of the obscuring fog with which her baffled and wounded passion had hidden him. He walked beside her, mute, broken, recalling to her image after image from their common store of memory. He was becoming real to her—perhaps for the first time. She had been in love with him, she had loved and pitied him, she had been bitterly angry with him. Now he was simply part of herself. He was her flesh and blood, and she saw herself through his eyes. Because she was going to meet Nat, was going to give herself to him, she felt Gale's torment like a hot iron in her own soul.

She stood looking about her helplessly, half dazed, incapable of action. What was all this business of sex? It had seemed a splendid, lovely thing. It had been the sudden blazing light which in a moment had revealed Gale and Justine to each other. It had been the pillar of fire which had guided them through the hard, dark years. She knew that it was not base. Nor had it been everything to either of them. It had been no more and no less than the outward and visible sign of the great truth of their union. But then it had turned against them. It had twisted and defaced them. It had forced them who were at heart honourable and faithful people to acts of hateful cruelty and disloyalty. When it had done with them they hadn't been able to recognize themselves or each other. They had become beggars and thieves—in tatters, eaten by disgusting sores.

Why did she have to think these things now—just when she wanted to throw herself wholly, with complete abandonment, into this new beginning? Life was malicious; there was some venomous force that at every moment of attainment jogged at the elbow, pointing ironically to spectres of another self and another happiness. There was nothing for it but to be strong and cut out what had been—even if it meant cutting out part of one's own brain and heart—to send the ghosts about their business.

The crowd jostled her. The friendliness and sense of a common destiny had long since been lost with all the other ephemeral beauties of that first day. Each man was for himself again, and lonely and angry and unhappy. Justine asked for the platform, and the official pointed to the index board.

"It's written up," he said crossly. But for a long time Justine couldn't find Nat's train. A sort of dullness had come over her eyes. Or perhaps she did not want to find it. Not yet. She needed time. After all these months of passionate waiting she needed time. She was late when at last she made her way through the gates.

She saw him at once. He was talking to a porter and pointing out his luggage. And for an interminable minute she knew that she was hiding from him. She had expected him to be changed. Perhaps—and the thought flashed through her mind with the quality of mad, ironic laughter—she had expected Gale. But there he was, slender and dark and composed—so absolutely effective, so capable of dealing with life—so damnably unhurt.

She couldn't stand there cowering forever. Any moment he might turn round and see her. He would never understand how it was possible to have chosen something deliberately and with your whole will, and then shrink from it in sheer abject terror. He would laugh—a little contemptuously. And he would be quite right, of course. In this disintegration of herself she had become despicable.

Everything in her was in tumult. She dragged her beaten forces to a rallying point. She found herself whispering: "This is what you have wanted. This is the only thing that can happen——" And a moment later she was touching him on the arm.

Her voice sounded too high-pitched—hard and sharp, with an unreal rejoicing:

"Why—Nat——!"

He turned quickly. He smiled down at her. His hand fastened itself on hers. And it was only because he hurt her that she knew what underlay his composure. The conventions protected her from it—for this minute.

"My dear——"

And then laughing at himself for this infraction of his own code, he kissed her. It was ghastly Gale should have to see him kiss her.

"I must play the game at least with someone," she thought bitterly. She smiled back at him. She felt sure that she looked radiant—a little shaken, perhaps, as was only natural. He would expect her to be deeply moved. It was fortunate that there were things he did not understand. She could hide from him her whole life long.

Mrs. Gee, the old housekeeper at Whiteladies, had nursed Jane when she was a little girl so it was of no use trying to be grown up. That made it the more difficult. The childish desire to push her plate aside and put her head down and cry her heart out ached beneath the surface of her composure. And Mrs. Gee, hovering about her anxiously, wanted her to break down so that she could comfort her. She wanted to know what was the matter. And if it had been possible to tell her she would have been as horrified and utterly perplexed as Elizabeth Lindesfarne herself. Indeed, the two of them, divided by class and upbringing, were of the same tradition. They were simple people, with rigid, uncomplicated notions about life.

So Jane sat up very straight at the long, empty table. Her favourite dishes had been prepared for her and she ate heroically. She couldn't bear to hurt the old woman's feelings—which was rather funny, seeing how ruthlessly she had hurt everyone. But she grew white and faint. She seemed to her-

self like the flame of one of the tall candles, burning itself out.

Afterward she escaped into the open. A fitful autumn wind came over the downs with a melancholy singing. It carried rain on its cold breath, and the beech leaves fell before it and fluttered against Jane's face and frightened her like the touch of ghostly fingers. She had never been frightened out-of-doors before. But something had happened. She had lost her unity with the familiar life about her. The trees had become hostile. There were unfriendly things behind the black overshadowing hedges. She began to run. She felt that she dared not stop until she reached the warmth and shelter of the fire where Baise sat waiting for her. He did not know that she was coming. But he waited all the same—as he had always waited. Poor Unky Baise! Only he wasn't Unky Baise any more. She loved him more than he loved her, and she was glad that it was so. All his life he had given too much—received too little; now it was for her to pour the passion and richness of her love over his starved heart.

The wind would be crying down Claire's chimney. Claire had had a little whimsical fancy about her chimney. She said that in its youth—many hundreds of years ago—it had had an unfortunate love affair with the church spire, which had blown down in an historic gale, and that ever since then when the wind came from the north it began to moan again and lament for the lost lover. Claire would remember her fancy. She would smile sadly to herself, for she was alone too. They were all three of them alone who had been so close to each other—Baise and Claire and Jane. The darkness and the wind and the rain and their tormented love hung between them like a curtain.

Jane ran till she reached the crest of the hill. Her breath hurt her and she stood still with her hand clenched against her throat. The rain ran down her cheeks. She did not know whether it was rain or tears that blinded her. But through

the blur she could see the light of his window. One more rush downhill and it would be over—this desperate fear and loneliness and uncertainty. She heard already the beat of her hungry, eager hand upon his door. He would open it to her. She saw the scarred, wan face light up with that tragic look of welcome. He would put his arm about her and bring her to the fire and they would sit crushed together—not speaking, for there was nothing more that they could say. They would listen to the wind and think of Claire. They would see her so clearly, for that new look of hers, that expression of high serenity and knowledge, was graven on their hearts. They would not kiss each other, for each kiss would seem like a fresh stone in the wall of desolation that they had built around her. It would seem as though in their happiness they derided her. But they were not happy.

And at last when they couldn't bear it any more he would walk home with her, trying to shield her from the storm with his big body. And all night long she would lie awake, knowing that for all her love she had not comforted him. She herself would be so utterly uncomforted.

It was as though it had all happened. And it was of no use. She turned back, shivering. If only she could go to Claire—Claire, whom she had lost and who had always been so strangely tender to her. Sometimes it had seemed to Jane that Claire loved her even more than she loved Peterkins. It was as though Peterkins worried her a little, like an echo of an old fear. But to Baby Jane she had shown a shy, contented motherliness. She had made up games for her little sister, and Baise had been their playfellow.

It had seemed as though life would go on like that forever.

And then—almost in a day—everything had changed. Baise no longer played with them. He had stepped out of the vague mists of boyhood. He became a man, and a man deeply in love. Jane remembered her bewilderment—the sense of loss that put an end to her own childhood. She had watched his love

for Claire grow from a self-distrustful hunger to a destroying force. She had been racked with pity for him, an ignorant, chivalrous, indignant pity. She had not known for a long time why she was so angry and unhappy. She did not know that she loved him, or recognize him as the hero of her splendid, romantic fancies. But when Claire escaped him, marrying the shadowy Peter, and Baise went into the wilderness, the truth broke over her with all the unhappy violence of adolescence. She loved him, she wanted him. For Claire she had had a contempt no less bitter because she loved her, too. There had been no question of treachery. She had taken up what Claire had so cruelly and foolishly rejected and held it to her own breast.

Even now she couldn't tell how deliberate her course had been. She had loved him with all her strength. She had encompassed him with her young, headlong loving, and in the end he had turned to her as a starved man turns to a warm fire and a richly spread table. She had won him. And now the three of them were alone.

She stood at the juncture of path and road. She could almost see the shadow of Claire's cottage. If only she could creep in, like the harried, storm-racked thing she was, and lay her head on Claire's knee. Oh, she could do it. There was a look in Claire's eyes, calm, sorrowful, and loving, that begged it of her. Claire understood. She didn't have to forgive. She wouldn't even let them tell her anything. She wanted to spare and comfort them. That was why it was impossible.

Jane crept home. She was wet through and shivering with cold and utter defeat. It was as though all the sorrow and inexplicable cruelty of life weighed on her shoulders. She was responsible for everything. She had made everyone unhappy.

There was a bright fire burning in her room and a hot-water bottle in her bed. It was absurd that when everything else in the world was lost a hot-water bottle should still have the power to comfort. She clung, sobbing, to its foolish, friendly

warmth, until at last her beaten body relaxed, and she lay still, watching the firelight dance upon the ceiling.

"If only the morning would never, never come!" she thought.

But the morning came, nevertheless, subdued and pale. A thin, autumn sunshine gleamed through the mist. The air tasted like fresh cold water from the hills. Jane was quiet, too. It was as though in one night she had passed through the crisis of a severe illness. She was weak and shaken. But her eyes were clear of fever. Under their dark brows they looked out with a wan steadfastness.

All her youth walked beside her along the familiar road and over the wet fields. She remembered the jolly days with Geoff and Baise and Justine—and Claire, timid and aloof, watching them as though she couldn't quite belong and yet wanted so much to join in and be jolly, too. Always Claire had stood on the brink like a frightened swimmer. And now at last she had plunged in and was swimming more bravely than any of them—trying to save everyone but herself. Geoff was dead. He had been spared the necessity of proving that he could live. And Justine and Jane, who had seemed so splendidly assured, had made a hateful mess of life.

Jane remembered how she had run down the hill with Baise and kissed him. "Unky Baise!" she had said, mocking and passionately tender. That night she had been almost sure of him. It was true that she hadn't known what she was doing. She hadn't understood Claire's love—hadn't believed in it. She had been too angry and perhaps too young. Only now she had to believe in it, because Claire had given Baise up.

Baise didn't know that she was at Whiteladies. It was all arranged between them. As soon as he could he was to sell the farm and go abroad to South Africa. And after a time when it became endurable she was to join him. Until then they were not to meet again. She had come down to Whiteladies

because she couldn't bear it any more. She *had* to see him—just once. There was surely some last thing that they could find to say to each other—something reasonable and just that would resolve all this unhappiness. There must be some fine releasing word. They would go to Claire and talk it all over. If you talked things over, quietly and sensibly, they were bound to get better. Perhaps Claire would tell them that she was happy.

Baise stood by the gate of his little garden. The garden was bright with the autumn flowers that Claire had planted for him. He stood with his hands resting on the top bar and his blind face lifted to the sun. Once he would have heard her footsteps. If they had been ever so soft and cautious he would have recognized them. But now he was not listening for them. He was saying good-bye to his fields and to this earth from which he sprang. He was saying good-bye to the house that Claire had made beautiful for them both—and good-bye to Claire herself, whom he had loved fiercely, and at last steadily and patiently. The bleakness of farewell was in the drawn, deeply lined face. It spoke out of the closed eyes.

Except that his hands tightened a little, he kept quite still. He did not feel the unflinching, penetrating regard. He made no defence against it—she knew things that he could never tell her, things that he had never told himself. And when she knew everything she turned and went back quietly the way that she had come.

3

Somewhere along the road it had happened. Justine could not have laid her finger on the moment or the place. But she knew now that on the day that she had passed Baise in unrecognizing silence the force of passion and anger and unrest that had swept her into this course had spent itself. As she rode home she had looked into the future as her mother might have done, accepting it because there was, for her, no longer any

choice. She had cut herself free from the tangled miseries of life. She had given up hope.

There had been dignity in that acceptance. Now there was none. She was passive only because there was nothing that she could do. She kept straight ahead because there was no turning possible. It seemed strange that this was so—that with no law or prison bars to prevent her she was still so helpless. In the crowded station where for a moment Nat had left her she had asked herself: "What am I doing here? Why don't I go?" It would be quite simple. She would just walk out of the station and out of all their lives. She would be free of them all. But she knew in her heart that she was playing with an unreality. Because she could choose she was not free. A prisoner had the right to escape his captors if he could. He could resort to any subterfuge, any trick, however treacherous. Being unfree he was outside the law. But the freeman was bound fast. He was responsible to the lives that touched his on either side. He was like a slave in a chain-gang. A rough, impetuous movement of revolt—a break for liberty—and he involved his companion in wrong and torment. His first and last duty was to keep step with them.

No, she had to wait for Nat. You couldn't, she thought, with a flash of bitter amusement, send to India for a man and then leave him stranded on a railway station. There were things one simply did not do—just as Elizabeth had said. From now on she must go with him. Besides, where else should she go? Even now he was a barrier against the invisible force that besieged her inner consciousness with some vague, outrageous demand upon her. She knew that she could not have held out alone. She had to do the irreparable thing so that the vast unrest within herself should be stilled finally. She had to burn her boats.

The rain streamed down the carriage windows. They had caught an afternoon train north, bound for some remote inn

upon the Yorkshire moors where Nat could shoot and ride without fear of meeting people who knew them both. If they had to defy the moral and social code, he had said, looking at her with a wry amusement, they might at least do it decently. They didn't need to flaunt themselves and drag their friends into the mess.

She looked across at him from under the shelter of her hand. Night had come on. The overhead lights threw pleasant shadows on the composed, good-looking face. She thought well of him—she must think well of him. She trusted him. He was what people called praisingly "a man's man." He could be trusted implicitly to do certain things in a certain accepted way. And certain things he would never do. There was something fine in that. She would never have to ask, "What will become of us?" She knew now. She could foresee their whole life together. No—there was no mystery in the power that he had over her—would still have over her, please God, when she had passed through this phase of numb bewilderment. He was cool and assured and balanced. He was everything that Gale had not been in those last years. Above all he was unhurt—the phrase flashed through her mind a second time—so damnably unhurt.

Well—he would give her peace.

She wondered what he felt for her—or rather what it was like to care in his way. He had not suffered on her account. He had simply gone on about his business, waiting. Not for a moment did she suppose that he had been physically faithful to her all those years. He would never pretend so much—might even be a little whimsically shocked at the suggestion. (Gale had been faithful, but then Gale's love had had a fanatic quality—and little good it had done him.) Still, after his fashion, Nat had been failthful, too. At least he had married no one else. And he was capable of sacrifice. For what she knew seemed to him a mere whim he was preparing to throw up his career and submit his name to the indignity of a [illegible]

scandal. Perhaps he realized that in her insistence on this course he had struck a resolution that was too strong for him. At any rate he had yielded. He had weighed one thing against another. If, at the bottom of his heart, there was a soreness at the price he had had to pay, he would not let it mar his pleasure in the thing that he had purchased. Instinctively he spared himself the worst distress of life. He would not suffer remorse, and he would not reproach her.

What was he thinking now? He smiled at her. There was perhaps the faintest touch of good-humoured malice in his smile. Perhaps he was remembering that day in Madrid. Perhaps he was saying slyly, "You see, you have come to this after all." But there was more than that in his eyes. She had no right to anger against him because he foresaw her final surrender.

She turned away from that hot, significant regard. It did not frighten or distress her now, only it seemed to her strange and rather futile. But then she was dying and saw passion from afar off. To-morrow she would be dead—this self that had suffered the War, that Gale had loved, would be no more to her new self than the story of someone she had once known. She would become quiet and complacent. She would have peace.

But for these last few hours she still belonged to the familiar, hurting things, to the haunted places where she had lived. What did condemned people do with their last hours—they who had no future? Should she lean across to this chosen executioner of hers and beg him to talk to her as one distracted, desperate human being to another? But then he was not desperate, not distracted. And neither his wife nor his children would ever really talk to him. Words, to Nat, formed part of the conventional highly stylized pattern of life. Each subject had its vocabulary. Some subjects one did not discuss at all, and automatically they ceased to exist. It was true that in his need of her he had broken strange ground. He had called

upon unexpected reserves of intuition, and had spoken forcefully from what secret life he had to what he conceived to be the secret life in her. But now that need was over. The chapter was closed. He would not let her open it again. In time she, too, would have nothing real to say. She would go about their ordered life in smiling, empty silence. She repeated it to herself like the phrase of a litany, "I shall have peace."

If not to him, then, to whom should she turn? To this unquiet, merciless man who sat beside her—who would not let her go? Wouldn't it be better to outface him—to say bravely, "Very well—for this last time, Gale, you and I will live together"?

Her mind rested on the broken pictures Alfred Powell had given her. She pieced them together. It must be cold up there now. Even on that August day, after the dusty, blinding heat, the rain had swept them with a chill bitterness. They had been thankful for the fire. And she remembered how people had told her of the winter storms that broke over the mountains—how the peasants accepted the cold as an act of God, dying under it without resistance. There would be poor shelter from it in Goana's ill-built hut. Gale and that woman might cower together as best they might—they would not bring each other warmth or comfort. Justine smiled at him tenderly and pityingly. He had not deceived her with that scarecrow figure—perhaps he had not even wanted to. There would never be any other woman in Gale Braddyl's life. He had given himself to her, and Fate, in an ironic mood, had made the gift final and absolute. But Fate had not really imposed itself on him; it had been his free will that had chosen. That was what he was telling her now. And it was not even that isolated act of union that was in his mind. She knew that, too. He was thinking of that night when they had sat together before the fire, hardly speaking, with the puzzled, sad-eyed sheep pushing softly between them. Then something tremendous had really happened.

"For me it can never be undone," he said to her. "But for you, of course, it is different." That was why he had gone back to Goana's hut to live out the life that had been born there.

From the Cornish days came the echo of seas breaking into hidden caverns, of a lark's singing and the quiet murmur of the tamarisk in the wind. Many years would have to pass before she could hear those sounds without a sickened heart. They had been happy in the cold, whitewashed little bedroom. But they had not known how happy.

"No, Gale, my dear, my dear—we mustn't talk of these things. What can it do for either of us? Don't you see that it's all over? Well, then, just for these last few minutes——"

Even in the house in London they had had happiness, though it was there of course that she had begun to fail him. She had known at the time that she was failing him. Perhaps it had been a mistake to blame herself so bitterly—pouring vinegar in an open wound. It would have been better to realize that they had both suffered too much. It was like pretending you were well and strong after a long, terrible illness—pretending that you had taken the War in your stride and that you could go on as though nothing much had happened.

Now Justine's thoughts wandered along that frozen, death-infested Serbian road, picking out the awful faces that she had kept hidden away in her secret gallery. They had been there all the time tormenting her with the memory of their pleading and her helplessness, so that in agony she had struck out right and left. She had been cruel and unjust. And Gale on his side——

"How many things you must have endured, Gale, of which you never spoke to me—of which you never even thought but which must have made you sure that sooner or later I would fail you—because life was so full of beastliness——"

She closed her eyes with her hand, holding back her tears. She knew now how it had been. They had used up their

powers of pity and imagination. Exhausted and overburdened, with the world fever still in their blood, they had had to face their own disaster.

"But even if we know that—of what use is it? I am going to this man; I shall be his wife. Don't you realize that, Gale? We can only forgive each other, and then forget. After tonight, my dear, my dear, I shall never think of you again—not like this——"

But if he thought of her—if he persisted?

"But you mustn't. You must let me go, Gale; you said you would. If you don't stop thinking of me, I shall never be free of you, my darling."

She spoke recklessly to him now, for it was for the last time. It was as though she had been holding a door against an invading force, and that now she had given up the struggle. She stood back, letting the enemy in, watching him despoil her of everything that she had kept hidden—even from herself. It was the better way. When he had got everything he wanted, he might leave her in peace to furnish the empty house as best she could.

"Yes, of course it happened to me, too. But that doesn't help us; we can't go back on what we've done. It's cowardly to be always looking back. We've got to live somehow—as decently as we can——"

The train was slowing up. She felt it like the shortening of her own breath—the failure of her own heart. The man opposite her had risen. He was a stranger to her. She watched him dully as he lifted down the suitcase.

"We're there," he said.

All the virtue had gone out of her. Surely she had never had the courage to face death. Like a sick, bewildered child she followed him. In the car, driving over the dark roads, he laid his hand over hers. It was a firm hold, not hurting, but terrible, because it demanded no response, and vibrant with a long-contained and reasonable desire.

The room was charming—old-fashioned and unpretentious and comfortable, with its big four-poster bed, the absurd photographs of solemn bewhiskered ancestors, the china dogs on the mantelshelf, and a clear fire burning. Nat had gone downstairs to talk to the landlord about horses and to leave her to unpack. He did everything gracefully and in order. But first he had put those strong, significant hands on her shoulders.

"Now your real life begins, Justine," he said, and, he added in a low voice, "you are my wife, you know."

He was reassuring her, and she drew back sharply, her mind clarified by a sudden point of light.

"Not yet."

"You will be. Why do you say that? You know you trust me——"

"Of course—of course I trust you——"

But they stood opposite each other like people who have felt the earth give under their feet. She saw him for the first time hesitant and disconcerted. But it was only for a moment. He would not recognize what had happened. He kissed her, sweeping over the event with a tide of passion.

Now she was trying to unpack. But it was of no use. She didn't seem able to think. She didn't know where to put things. There was no meaning in anything she did, since such a little while remained to her. Life was slipping through her hands, faster and faster. She couldn't hold it any more. And underneath this stupor was a cold contempt for what she had become. She had cut herself off from the misery of life and from its fineness and its beauty. She had cut herself off from the source of her own integrity.

"I shall have peace," she said, but now the phrase had a crazy sound.

She drew the blind aside. The night rose up against her. She could only guess at the bleak, wild hill country rolling to meet the sea. But there was a man out there; she saw him quite plainly. He stood and looked up at her and did not

speak or move. She had always thought of him as part of the earth. Now he was the storm and the wind. His tears ran down her window.

In the passage she could hear Nat's voice—Nat's step. She spoke urgently, with a last anger.

"Yes—I love you—I love you, Gale. But you must go now. You must go a long way where you can't see or hear. You must never come back——"

She let the blind fall. She faced the quietly opening door.

XI

1

Balthazar and Pepe took turns as nurse, and once a day old María would come down, ostensibly to cook for them, but in reality to keep an eye on Gale and see that he did not escape her, and to take good news back to Don Cristóbal, who was fretting for his best soldier. Chiquita, after that first moment, kept apart. She ate alone. She slept in the shed that Gale and Pepe had built on to Goana's hut, accepting silently and with seeming indifference the fact of her uncleanness. But once, at the crisis of Gale's fever, she came and stood beside him, and he had a moment's clear vision of her.

"I'm feeding your dogs," she said. "Leah and I are friends——"

And he saw her suddenly as a child, beaten and battered, bringing him the only gift that was in her power. He tried to thank her, but she turned and left him as abruptly as she had come. She never touched him. And yet he felt that it was her bitter understanding that was drawing him steadily back to life.

When he was well enough to get about again, Chiquita crept into her bed as a dying animal creeps into its hole.

"You and I take it in turns, señor," she said grimly, "but for me it is the last turn."

The surly and unwilling doctor who, in spite of her angry protest, came from Tuella, gave his final verdict. Fortunately her heart, weakened by years of privation, was giving out fast. All that could be done now was to take her to a hospital where she could at least die harmlessly.

Gale shook his head.

"I know all about hospitals. Besides, she is afraid to die alone—and she and I are friends."

"You have the child to consider."

"I have considered him."

"You run grave risks, señor."

Gale was silent for a moment. He knew that it was true. At first he hadn't cared—had been scornful of the whole business of life. Then he had begun to think of Pepe. He had tried to send Pepe away—to women in the village who would take care of him. But Pepe had come back, set-faced and bitterly resolute. He had sat just out of reach but within hearing, and waited until Gale had had to call him home.

And Chiquita he could never send away.

"Pepe and I have talked it over, Doctor," he said. "We take our precautions, as best we can. For the rest, he agrees with me that there are times when it is wise to live dangerously."

The doctor eyed him with ironical suspicion. This foreigner who looked like a Visigothic peasant, who nursed a dying prostitute in a hovel and who could pay a doctor's fees lavishly, presented an insoluble mystery. He shrugged his shoulders.

"No doubt you have done so," he said.

Gale heard Chiquita's laugh—a harsh, rasping sound like the cawing of a raven. And when he went back into her room her ravaged eyes, which did not seem terrible to him now, rested on him with an expression so mocking and so gay that involuntarily he laughed with her. Just then it was not difficult to believe that she had once been pretty.

"The little doctor does you wrong, señor."

But her irony did not hurt him. Ever since he had lain helpless under her hands and had seen her cry for him and his frustrated life, a poison had gone out of his blood. The wound was there, but it was clean and cool.

"When am I to go, señor?" And now she spoke almost in-

solently, and he came and stood beside her and laid his hand on hers.

"Why are you afraid? You know you are not going."

"But if I do you harm——?"

"You and Pepe and Leah are all I have to take care of. I have to have someone to take care of, you know. Otherwise I seem to rot. I'm really awfully grateful. You mustn't leave me, Chiquita."

She smiled ironically. But after that she was silent and content.

Those were quiet days. The red earth seemed to be falling asleep. Clouds hung over the crests of the mountains, but as yet they were only scouts who withdrew again, leaving a mellow, unclouded sunlight and at night a blazing roof of stars. Once on his way back from Don Cristóbal's house Gale met a sudden wind that dug its fangs into him and was gone. He looked down and saw that Pepe, who trotted at his side, had grown pinched and small.

"It is the winter, señor. I hate the winter. Is it true that we shall ever go from here?"

"Some day," Gale said. "Not yet."

That was all he knew about it—that one day they would be gone, but that the time had not come for them. He had to wait, holding himself still for whatever was to happen. Sometimes at dusk in the brief, mysterious interlude when visible things about them began to flow back into the unseen, he felt that he was being pressed gently against a thin barrier that divided him from another consciousness. At any moment he might break through. At first he had been angry and unwilling, for he knew that afterward it would not be possible to sink into the oblivion to which he had the right. Some greatness would be demanded of him. Now, with a quiet heart he awaited the event.

It was the more easy to wait because there was so much to

do, and at night he rested dreamless and almost without thought in his tired body. For a long time past he had not dared allow Chiquita to care for them, and now he nursed her single-handed, standing ceaselessly on guard between her and the boy to whom the spectacle of human misery was too familiar to be horrible. At Gale's warning he shrugged his thin shoulders.

"Women don't hurt me," he said. "I'm too small." He added wistfully, "Perhaps when I am older it will be different."

Nevertheless he followed the laws Gale laid down like the ritual of a religion in which he had no special faith, but with which it was wiser to take no liberties. One never knew. The Virgin was only a silver statue, but she had done strange things to people.

In their spare time they built a real window into Chiquita's room so that the sunlight fell upon her bed, and afterward a rough shelter for the village dogs against the winter. The most miserable of them and a tragi-comic litter of puppies Gale had put an end to. He had no illusions as to his own futility. Sooner or later the misery and cruelty—the whole incomprehensible manifestation of life in suffering—would begin again. But he had to do what he could, suffering himself bitterly enough. For the wretched animals had come to trust him, and he had a love for them that seemed a very part of himself. He only hoped that where they went they would be given understanding and know that he had meant well and had not betrayed them.

"I'm the worst sort of idiot," he told Pepe, "a sentimentalist."

"That must be very nice," Pepe said.

And on that day of death Pepe took Leah up into the mountains. He did not want her to be frightened or distressed by what was happening to her old friends. He himself was white and serious, and when he came back at evening he sat close to Gale, and Gale knew that he was shaken by a vague new sorrow. Compassion had been born in him, and he had become vulner-

able. But it seemed there was no other way for a man to grow.

When they were not too busy and Chiquita was well enough to be left, Gale and Pepe would work with Father Valeza in the dark vault, seeking and ordering as best they could in the wilderness of books. They were near the end now and had broken through to a stratum of rare and ancient things. It seemed to Gale that Valeza never slept. The light burned ceaselessly in the sacristy, and when they passed through the church he would throw the tranquil Virgin a strange wild look of anguish. It was as though he pleaded with her, "You whom I have offended—in whose being I have no faith—forgive me. Give me time——"

Yet sometimes he would tear himself away and come down and read the prayers for the dying to Chiquita, and once he brought her the Sacraments, Pepe serving him in his torn and dirty cotta and filling the little room with stifling clouds of incense. Gale and Balthazar knelt by the open door. And Gale knew that if none of them believed in what was happening, yet they were moved and comforted by a mere miraculous beauty.

Afterward Balthazar stayed on and smoked interminable cigarettes, and talked in his large, vigorous way of his great days in the bullrings of Madrid and Seville. It was as though everyone wanted to help Chiquita now and to show that though they did not know what it was between her and Gale, they had good faith and understanding. Those were friendly, peaceful evenings.

In the afternoon Gale would visit Don Cristóbal and old María and talk with them, sitting by the window from which they could keep watch over the mountains. Don Cristóbal lay on his long couch, for he was very feeble now, as frail and transparent as the old parchments that were the source of his inner life, and when night came, and with it the rising tide of illusion, he gave the defence into Gale's hands.

"I am too old," he said. "But God has sent me a son and a brave soldier——"

And Gale said, "Every man is at his post, señor. You may sleep in peace."

The eyes of the old woman rested on him with a fierce gratitude.

Outside Pepe and Leah would be waiting for him and they would trudge down the hill together.

Often Chiquita could not sleep for pain and fever. Gale would hear her moaning to herself and he would go into her room, which for all his efforts smelt close and fetid, and sit beside her and tell her stories from his young days and from the War. He did not speak of Justine and she never questioned him. But one night she asked him of the pretty book which she had seen him reading, and so it came about that he told her of little Alfred Powell and of Margaret's life with him and of their death. He even tried to translate some of Margaret's letters into his rough Spanish, and he saw that she grew quiet, held more closely than by the stories of his adventures.

"They were great lovers," she said at last, "that funny, ugly little man——" He saw the shadow of a smile glide over her distorted face. "That did not matter—it does not matter even to you, señor, does it—that I have become loathsome?"

"No," he answered. And he added without knowing that he was to say it, "I love you."

And she did not laugh bitterly as he might have expected, but seemed contented as with a version of some truth that she had long since accepted.

That night he stayed with her, for when she fell asleep she held his hand in hers and he did not want to wake her to her misery. And after a while he, too, began to drift away. He did not know where he went; it was a dark, empty country without landmarks. But Justine was there. For weeks he had not thought of her, for he knew that Nat had come home and

that she was happy with him. So he had thrust her across the borderland of his consciousness, beyond the reach of his imagination. Now he, too, had crossed the frontier. They were together. He could not touch her, he could not see her, yet never in their lives had she been so close to him. He dared not move lest the peace between them should be broken.

One day, far on into the autumn, Pepe took him to the top of the mountain behind the village. There in a cone-shaped hollow like the mouth of a volcano was a small, deep lake which was the source of the village stream. The water, Pepe said, stood higher than it was wont to do. Or perhaps he had forgotten—for it was a long time since he had seen it last. People very rarely climbed up as far unless it was in search of stray cattle. The path was hard and tedious and there was a vague, unhappy superstition about the place.

Gale and Pepe sat at the edge of the sombre, motionless waters and ate their bread together. The familiar clouds hung over the Pyrenees which had a gray look as though the ghostly life had gone out of them, and all around was a chill breathlessness. Gale's eyes chanced on the face of his old wrist watch, and he remembered what day it was.

"In my country, Pepe," he said, "there is silence everywhere. The people are standing in the streets, listening to it."

"Why is that, señor?"

"They are remembering their dead."

"I will try and remember my mother," Pepe said, "but it will be difficult because she died when I was a baby."

He sat very still, with his brows knitted and his arms clasped about his knees.

But Gale thought: "She has remembered me. She could not help herself. And she knows that I have thought of her."

It was as though they had met face to face at a rendezvous which they would have to keep as long as they lived. He wondered, "What shall we say to each other?"

But now the clouds were moving up from the mountains. They were no longer scouts; they were the vanguards of an army. Long before Gale and Pepe had scrambled back to the village they were overhead, and the narrow streets were swept by the gray, serried ranks of their glacial infantry. A fierce wind had risen. From time to time Gale and Pepe had to take refuge from it in the open doorways, and when at last they reached the bottom of the hill, that in a few minutes had become the bed of a torrent, they were half blind and stupefied with cold and weariness. So that it was not strange, perhaps, that for a moment Gale thought he saw the bound and trembling sheep outside his door and that he heard their crying.

Chiquita had dragged herself out of bed to meet him. She was frightened and clung desperately to him, and her sobs were horrible and uncouth, for the disease was in her throat now and she was almost voiceless. Like a child he lifted her in his arms and carried her back, comforting her. The odour of death and corruption seemed to nauseate his very brain. But she knew nothing but his pity and his tenderness.

"I was afraid," she whispered. "Something is going to happen. Don't leave me to die alone."

"I promise you," he said.

He built a fire and he and Pepe sat before it with Leah lying at their feet, and dried themselves and listened to the rain and the wind. Although it was only midday it was dark as night in the old hut, and they were dead with weariness. Presently Pepe crept into his corner, curled up and went to sleep. Gale supposed that he must have slept, too. He supposed that it was in a dream that he felt something warm and soft press against him, and that it was only in a dream that he awoke. He saw Justine. She sat opposite him on the low stool. Her face was buried in her hands, and the slow tears ran down between her fingers.

Justine, who never cried.

2

And now the winter had come and with it a great misery. Day after day the rain poured down from bitter, leaden skies, and there was no respite from the wind. The people came in from what work they could do and tried to warm themselves and dry their wretched clothes before the sullen charcoal fires. They grew silent, and at night, the streets and the Plaza were black and deserted. The cattle, without proper food and shelter, died on the sodden fields. One day Balthazar came to Gale with a grim face and told him that El Grande was dead, too.

"You broke his heart," he said; "he had no fight in him." And then he went on to say that the stream behind the cemetery had swollen to a torrent and that the cemetery itself was menaced. So Gale and some of the younger, stronger men went up with stones and bricks taken from the outer walls of the fortress, and tried to keep the water to its course. But it was hard work, and the men were not really willing. In some of their minds was the thought that the stream belonged to the Virgin and that they were striving against her will, and others, who believed very little in the Virgin or in God Himself, were yet convinced of a destiny they could not alter. They watched Gale's struggle with the dark irony of their wisdom.

Then suddenly the rain and the wind ceased and there were days of quiet. The sun shone, the sky was clear and cold, and they could see the mountains glittering under the fresh snows. But it was strange that there was no lifting of the menace. A truce had been called, and in it the enemy winter marshalled his forces. Against him the villagers had nothing but their stoicism and their resignation. It seemed to Gale that in these days each man withdrew into himself. In the streets they passed each other without greeting, and they no longer gathered together in Balthazar's *fonda*. But in the church the Virgin from her high place among the star-pointed candles looked

down upon a ceaseless stream of suppliants. Gale, coming out among them from his share of Valeza's feverish labours, saw their eyes fixed on her as on a vision vouchsafed to each of them alone, and he knew that they prayed to her for consolation not of this world. They did not ask her to change the winds or the rain or to lift their biting misery from them. So much was beyond their faith in her. They prayed to her for a place in heaven.

One Sunday while the fine, still weather lasted Don Cristóbal came down to Mass. Gale and Balthazar half carried him between them, and he knelt alone by the altar like an old general before battle. Behind him were ranked his soldiers, and their voices rose in a strong, deep chant with the ascending clouds of incense. At the tinkling of the bell that proclaimed a miracle among them they bowed together so that they did not see, as Gale saw, how their priest's bitter and driven face became transfigured with a look of beatitude and knowledge. It was as though he had said aloud, "To-day I shall find what I am seeking."

And it was not the Host that he held up in the bloodless hands.

Pepe, kneeling at Gale's side, pressed closer to him. Even now he was half afraid the Virgin might grant him some heavenly favour that he had not prayed for.

There was no food in the village that could sustain Chiquita in these days. So Gale borrowed Balthazar's mule and set off alone for Tuella. It was a fine, clear morning and he was glad of the long walk before him and for the respite from the close atmosphere of suffering. He felt suddenly young again and almost gay, as though a weight had been lifted from his heart. He did not know whence this lightness came. He accepted it as he accepted everything now, unquestioningly and with a sort of humility, like a child.

Many years had passed since he had driven up this same

road. Then he had been at the height of his youth and of his confidence in life and in himself. But it seemed to him that not so much had happened since then as had happened in these last months. Between the Gale who had sent his big car roaring lustily round the dusty curves and this peasant fellow plodding at the heels of his mule there seemed only an interval of years. But the Gale who had come this way with his teeth set hard in his agony, seeking at best the peace of a stoic and pitiless resignation, was a stranger, as a man in the height of delirium is a stranger to himself. Then he had seen in this barren country a fitting background to his own fruitless and broken life. He had hugged its harshness to his heart. He had asked nothing of it. And it had given him charity, it had given him kinship so that against his will he had found his people between the walls of an alien village, and his life had been interwoven with their lives.

They needed him, they had come to count on him, each according to his own loneliness. To Balthazar he was the strong comrade who but for the curse of some odd twist of soul might have made the greatest *espada* of his time. To Valeza he was a mind who could pity and understand his hunger and spiritual isolation. Because of him Don Cristóbal would die in peace, believing that his charge had been handed on into brave keeping, and Chiquita would not be afraid to die. When he left her he saw an animal terror in her eyes, but when he came back and sat with her, holding her hand, she would grow quiet and her suffering would clothe itself in restraint and dignity as though the soul in her mustered all its forces to do him honour.

It was true that he loved her. With her he had formed a relationship stripped of desire and happiness. They had come together cynically, almost with hatred, and had found in each other the one essential virtue of compassion.

Gale wanted her to die, for she was suffering hideously. But

he knew that then he would have to face another loneliness and seek out another way of life. He told himself that he would wait for so long as old Cristóbal needed him. Then he would go—he did not know where—he and Pepe together.

Pepe would be left him. Pepe was like a testimony of that other life—of that other splendid living self. One day he would tell everyone—tell Pepe, who thought of his father as dead and rightly burning in Purgatory for his sins. His son. He had to laugh to himself—it was so odd that his son should be this little brown Spanish fellow, and that they should always have to talk to each other in a foreign tongue. He was sure now that Justine would not have been angry—not even hurt. She would have been glad for him, and that took the last sting out of his happiness.

No, not happiness. After all it wasn't happiness that he had or ever could have. It was something else—some mysterious state of being that he must not question. It was like one of those old miracles of the saints that, under the relentless eyes of everyday experience, became sheer childishness, but which, if they were not handled, but left as fragile, fragrant flowers upon an altar, gave out a mystic truth and beauty of their own.

Gale had started out at daybreak; by midday he had turned homeward. He felt then, as he began the ascent of the long, winding road, that some change had taken place—was taking place even now. It was in himself, like a prophetic sense of calamity. It was in the light that had become dull and sinister, filling the troughs and hollows of the red plain with shadow so that more than ever it was like a sea, spellbound in a moment of rising tumult. At first Gale could not tell whence the light came, but as he turned a curve of the road he stopped short, arrested by a memory that was like an assassin, springing out of ambush. It was the memory of a bombardment. It had

lasted three days, ushering in an attack as bloody [illegible] it had been fruitless. Then, as now, the sky itself seemed to have taken on the livid hue of destruction. But not till now had Gale known that he had been so terribly afraid.

Overhead the blue still persisted, but the depth had gone out of it; it was pale and sickly looking. It broke abruptly against [illegible] terrific, imperceptibly moving cloud, ebony-smooth along its edge but carrying within itself coils and whirlpools of black violence. There was no wind. The cloud moved by an inner compulsion of its own. From minute to minute a light flashed over the mountain and there was a sound like that of heavy artillery being rushed forward over cobbled roads. Now Gale could see the village, thrust out like a brave but battered ship to meet the assault—then suddenly it was gone. A smother of ugly yellow, streaked like paint on canvas, hid it from sight, so that for one moment of imaginative horror Gale believed that it had foundered.

"If there was another War I'd run away," Gale thought.

He hurried on, ruthlessly driving the tired and uneasy mule before him. Though it was bitter cold the sweat ran down their bodies and the air was heavy and unrefreshing. What light there was seemed to emanate from the storm itself and to have the distorting quality of darkness. He could barely distinguish Goana's old hut that lay beyond the shelter of the village walls in a trough of the earth like a small boat cast off from the parent ship and sinking fast. Even as Gale stopped [illegible] moment, granting himself and his companion breathing space, a light went up and he pressed on again, recognizing it as a last signal of despair.

By now the blue had vanished. It was as though the piled-up forces from the west had been no more than a feint. The attack was from all sides. Swiftly, stealthily, the whole horizon had been caught in the encircling advance. A fantastic night had fallen—but [illegible] yet no rain. Gale was almost at his door when the cloud above him was torn from end to end with the sound

of ripping canvas, and from the riven edges descended—not rain, as it seemed to Gale in that bewildered moment of remembrance, but a hail of steel.

It was like a fragment of a mediæval nightmare. Gale had been forced to drive his mule into the shelter of the low, whitewashed room that had been the extent of Goana's original dwelling, and old Léah, rising from sleep, advanced upon the monstrous intruder with a savage growl that sent the already terrified animal plunging and kicking among the sparse furniture, overturning chairs and water pitchers, and trampling on the rough bedding where Gale and Pepe slept. A charcoal fire that glowed dully on the flat hearth made incredible shadows of the scene—distorting Leah's crouched body and the mule's long ears and lashing hoofs to satanic shapes. To Gale, drenched and breathless, it was as though the place were possessed by devils and that through the crackling thunder and torrential downpour he could hear the inhuman moaning of the damned.

He called Leah to heel and turned, to see Pepe standing with the lighted lamp in the doorway. He had been frightened, too. Not all his impish scepticism could keep the quaver of an interrogation out of his small voice—

"Señor, she says it is the Day of Judgment."

"Would that be so terrible?" Gale asked.

The Day of Judgment, he thought, would be something like this—a vast confusion, part tragic, part ludicrous. He tethered the mule to an iron ring in the wall, soothing the poor brute gently, and then took the lamp into his own hands.

"Stay here, Pepe. Get food for us. I have brought good things for you."

He went into Chiquita's room. She lay tossed among her pillows, wild, disrupted-looking, scarcely human in the complete breakdown of her courage. Gale caught his breath; the air was almost unendurable, feted with corruption and the pungent, unnerving smell of bodily terror, but he dared not open the window, against which the rain lashed like a sea.

He set the lamp down and bent over her. There was so little that he could do. He wiped the sweat from her forehead and the foam from a mouth that sores had eaten to an indecipherable cavity—"If it's the Day of Judgment, we'll go together, Chiquita. We'll see each other through——"

Her eyes fastened themselves on his in a long, tortured look of supplication. She whispered, "Stay with me, stay with me——"

And he answered in a passion of pity: "I'd go all the way with you if I could. But I'll have to go alone, too; it's the same for all of us in the end."

"What have I done?" she asked.

"What have any of us done?" He took in the whole implication of her frantic question. "I had a friend, Chiquita—I have him still, for that matter—a mass of battered flesh, alive though, and with a mind—speechless—sightless—who'd been so decent—— It's like a battle—the blow falls anywhere—on anyone—on you—on me——"

"I know"—she pressed his hand against her breast. Then flashed at him with something of her old bitterness. "Do you still love that friend?"

"Yes." But he knew that he had tried not to—had tried to forget. And all these years he had remembered everything—day in, day out. Perhaps if he had told Justine how it had been with him—— But there was a convention—that sort of thing was never talked about. Besides, if a tragedy went on too long even the people who loved you got sick of it. You got sick of it yourself. You buried it out of sight—buried it alive.

She began to cry again, "Stay with me—stay with me." And he knelt down and put his arm under her and drew her head against his shoulder. Then she grew quiet. Everything grew quiet about them. It was as though her terror had been the heart of the demonic unrest and that now the very shadows settled in their places. The hut that for a moment had seemed on the point of being swept from its foundations, took root

again. There was the storm outside, but around them were small, peaceful sounds—their own quiet breathing, the pastoral stamp of a hoof, the domestic clatter of Pepe among the plates and dishes.

But when he brought her food she would not touch it. She lay with her face to Gale's breast. "It's of no use now." Her free hand held fast to him. "What will become of me?" she asked.

"It may be that you will find marvels and wonders that none of us have even dreamed of," Gale said, "or you may just sleep. It can't be worse than that."

"What is death? You are so wise, you have seen so many die."

"I am not wise at all. I have learned nothing."

But he began to tell her of his friends who had been killed close to him, and how each man had died curiously after his own fashion. "Sometimes there were so many dead," he said, "that it was we, the living, who felt lonely and unreal." Indeed, it was always like that if you came to think of it. There were so many dead, the living were just a handful.

He made no conscious effort to comfort her. He did not talk to her with the pitying superiority of the living. For she was himself and he spoke of what was common to them both. Indeed, against the stupendous background of eternity there was so short an interval between their passing that it scarcely counted. He spoke of the black fear that at one time had sought him out in the small hours of the night—of his incredulous recoil from the knowledge that one day just that would happen to him, too, and of how of late the fear had left him and he could face the thought calmly and even, sometimes, with an adventurous eagerness. He did not know whether she heard him. A wind had risen and added to the almost incessant thunder a quality of demented, passionate remorse.

At the height of a long gust the outer door flew open. The light spluttered and went out and the door banged to again. Gale relighted the lamp and turned to see what seemed a drenched and tattered scarecrow, crouched on the floor opposite

him. Old María lay where the storm had thrown her. Her gray, sparse hair hung about her eyes. Her dress, plastered to her body with mud and rain, revealed a skeleton, so that to Gale's storm-heightened imagination it was as though a dead woman crooked her finger at him.

"You must come, come at once!"

"No," he said.

They regarded each other with a grim antagonism.

"You must. He is asking for you. He says that the final assault is at hand. The enemy is sweeping all before him. Every man must be at his post. He is trying to arm himself."

The illusion enthralled her. Her beaten, exhausted reason saw the dark faces of an ancient enemy crowding upon the walls. It was a vision so strong that it beset him too with the force of an actuality, so that he found himself torn and hesitant.

"I cannot—you see I cannot." He added after a moment, "Tell him that I am in the thick of the fight and that I will not come to him until the enemy has been beaten back. Tell him that we trust him to stay at headquarters where our messages can find him. He is a soldier. That is something he will understand."

"You must come yourself. He will not believe me. He will say that you are dead."

"Nevertheless, I cannot come, Maria."

"You are afraid," she screamed at him.

He laughed. "If you please to think so——"

She measured him in brooding silence.

"Let Pepe come—Pepe can bear me witness that I saw you alive."

"No, it is too rough."

"Not too rough for an old woman," she taunted him. "Too rough for you and yours."

Uneasily Gale had seen Pepe wrap his short cloak about him.

"I am not afraid," Pepe said. "I will see you safe home, Mother, and bring the message." He stood close to Gale for a moment, touching his sleeve shyly with his hand. "I am not afraid of thunder, señor. You have told me that it cannot hurt. And if I see the lightning it means that I am safe and that it has struck someone else. I am not at all afraid."

"Go with God, then," said Gale roughly.

He heard the difficult closing of the door. After that the storm swept over the retreating steps, seeming to cut him off in utter isolation with the dying woman. She had not moved, and he did not think that she had heard what had passed. But presently her eyes opened, and she muttered:

"Thank you."

She was very still. She did not even hold his hand. But he knew that she was conscious of him and that his nearness upheld and comforted her. He sat down close to her, watching the slow, inevitable change upon her quiet and awful face. Something was happening to him, too—a passing of some sort. Through her he was reaching out to a new level of life. It seemed strange to him now that he should ever have been so passionately concerned with so many unmeaning things, and that he should ever have been angry with Justine—so angry that there had been moments when he had desired nothing but to kill her and himself. For what? Because she had found life difficult—the adjustment between soul and body beyond the powers of her restraint and wisdom? Had he himself had so little understanding, so much to boast of? Now he could only think how desperately he wanted to shield her—to keep pain from her and loneliness and fear. The thought that one day she, too, must be struck down—perhaps no more mercifully than this—went to his heart with an agony of pity so piercing that it was like remorse, as though he himself were responsible for the universal fact of death. He thought of Nat—he could think of

him now calmly and with indifference. For Nat would be no comrade to her then. He could not and would not go with her. No matter what their lives together had been, in that hour he would inevitably forsake her. Then it would be to Gale that she would turn home. He would wait for that time. He would hold himself in readiness. They had made tragic confusion of their lives, but he knew now that in the end he would have the right to say that he had truly loved her.

There had been silence for a time—a bewildering, deafening silence. The rain stopped suddenly, and involuntarily Gale stood up, bracing himself. He heard the cracked old bells of the church toll once, and the sound seemed to have all the pathos of a farewell—of a sad prevision. Then it happened. It was like a hammer-stroke, shattering the world in ruins. The lamp fluttered and went out. In pitch darkness they heard the sound of water, the rush of a river at their very feet.

In that moment Gale remembered Pepe. He found the door and tore it open. A sickly half-light like an illuminated fog pressed against his eyes. He could see nothing. But the sound of water had grown more ominous.

"Señor, the dark——"

She was crying for him. But now he could not and would not heed her.

"Something has happened——" He came back and lit the lamp. "I must find out——"

"Stay with me, stay with me——"

"The lightning struck that time—in the village. Pepe is up there. I told him not to be afraid."

She grasped his arms, pulling him close.

"I am dying—what is he to you?"

He told her then. He had to free himself quickly from her demand of him.

"My son."

"Yours?"

"Mine and Anna's. Anna—I never knew her other name—she's dead now. But we were lovers up here—ten years ago——"

He heard her laughing with a last irony. But she would not let him go; her fingers seemed to wind themselves into his very flesh.

"Philippe and Anna's son—she was my friend—before she died she told me—Philippe was married—she shielded him. Did you think that you——"

He stood quiet then. He did not question her truth, but he considered it wonderingly. For it had no significance. It had no meaning beside this revelation in himself. He felt that a wind was blowing through him and that the barrier had become a thin, fluttering veil. He had only to make one final gesture to be through.

He went to the door, closed it, and came back. He sat down with his face hidden in his hands. He heard her thick frightened whisper—

"You're angry?"

"No—no——"

"Does it mean so much?"

He answered quietly, "It meant a lot once—not now."

So he had been stripped of the last possession of his body—its last pride. He was released from the bondage of its illusion. The lust of possession, the need to impose his image upon another life, was dead in him. The thought of it had become wholly pitiable. He loved this Pepe who was not his and in whom he had no part. That was what mattered. And it was all that mattered.

He sat very still, like a man exhausted from a long journey. He heard her difficult movement. He felt her hand rest upon his head briefly, but with compassion.

"Go—find him. I am not afraid any more to be alone."

He had a vision of the old woman and the little boy facing this alone. Pepe would take María's hand and be very elderly and wise about it all. He would tell her that thunder hurt no one—the Señor said so—and that if you saw the lightning you knew it hadn't struck you.

The ground seemed to be dissolving under Gale's feet. A torrent, glacial and laden with ruin, flung him against the high, invisible wall of the road. Pepe and old María must have gone down before it. They must be dead. He shouted to them. It was conceivable they might have found refuge on some rising ground or in one of the crannies where Pepe, like a lizard, hid himself in the hot summer days. But there was no answer. Indeed, they could not have heard him. His voice was lost in the tumult of the water and the miserable, incessant crying of the wind. As he reached the level ground of the Plaza a fantastic remnant of daylight revealed shadows that passed him silently, swiftly, flying like phantoms from darkness into darkness. Invisible shapes that made him sick with an unreasoning horror swirled against his knees in the black tide and were gone, slipping from his desperate grasp with a tragic mockery. It was like a dream, frantic, incredible, but striking to the mind with a fear that reality could not inflict. Once he imagined that he saw Valeza, like a leaf before the wind, twisting, turning, his face livid, hugging damnation to his breast; and old Cristóbal, with his sword and armour, shouting his battle cry, run to the ramparts. But these were fancies. And Pepe he could not see at all.

The night closed down again. He fought his way to the church steps, dragging himself out of the flood as a drowning man drags himself on to a familiar shore. There he touched life—huddled bodies that moved but had no warmth, that had sunk into a beaten, hopeless apathy.

He spent the night among them. With the coming of a quiet and sickly dawn he recognized their faces, but they looked past

him sightlessly. When he spoke to them they were like deaf people. They did not answer. Several had died. They lay cast up on the lower steps—indecipherable heaps of sodden rags and flesh.

Now Gale could take toll of the disaster. Lightning had struck the church. The tower was gone, fallen in upon itself. From the overflowing lake the torrent had swept over the cemetery and, flinging itself down the narrow Calle de la Virgen, had choked the Plaza with rocks and stones, fragments of coffin, and things from which Gale turned with a sick heart. He fancied that he recognized a hand lifted out of the wreckage—withered and almost fleshless. It seemed to appeal to him as though after all old Luis, who had died so well and peacefully, had become afraid.

Gale turned and climbed slowly up the steps to the western porch. Here everything was quiet and unchanged. The little figures in the tympanum still held their quaint and solemn feast together. The outcast Judas and the betrayed Christ still looked at each other questioningly, and the six-pointed star held its place in its stony firmament. But inside the church the light had broken.

Gale made his way through the bowed and silent people, and knew of an ecstasy transcending grief. Between them and the altar lay the ruins of the tower and a gray iridescent veil. After twelve hundred years the silver Virgin looked down upon her faithful, not from her mystic candle glow but in the stranger light of morning. Alone of all her tall white servants the red lamp kept its vigil, gleaming at her feet like a spot of sacred blood. She herself was unharmed, unchanged, miraculous.

Men were silently uncovering the ruins; they stood back as Gale approached them, and he saw what lay there—Valeza, face down before the altar, his arms tight-clasped across his breast. They said that at the last moment, before the cloudburst, he had been seen running across the Plaza to the sacristy like a lost soul pursued by demons. They turned him over unwil-

lingly. He was carrion now. He had mocked God, and God had punished him and with him the people who by their apathy and indifference had condoned his mockery.

But Gale bent down and gently loosened the volume from that frozen, desperate hold. The Beattus? No one would ever know; the pages were saturated and unrecognizable. Perhaps at the last moment he had brought his treasure to the Virgin, saying: "Forgive me. I, too, have greatly loved." The poor, battered face answered no questions.

Don Cristóbal was close by. But him they had laid out with reverence, his hands crossed upon his sword hilt. It seemed that he had been granted miraculous strength and had died fighting, gathering his people into the sacred stronghold as his ancestor, Don Fernando, had done. And now the Virgin looked down upon him tenderly and upon the bowed shrunken figure of an old woman.

Gale touched her on the shoulder. He was frightened by his own voice in the stillness—

"And Pepe——?"

She did not answer him.

But it was as though someone else answered. He looked up. And in the deep recess behind the shining silver figure he saw a small brown face peer down at him, half shamed, half eager. And it seemed to Gale that for a moment the corners of the Virgin's mouth quivered with holy laughter.

The steps that had led up to Pepe's refuge were broken away, and Gale had to climb on to the altar to lift him down. And though Pepe was unhurt he carried him out of the church and down the steps, holding him close like a small child. He could not let him go. And Pepe lay quiet against his shoulder and made no protest.

"After all, the Virgin protected me," he said. He added slyly, "She had to—I hid so close to her."

"I always told you," Gale said, "she was a kindly lady."

In the Plaza they found Balthazar working stolidly at the débris outside the door of his inn. He stopped a moment, contemplating some grim fragment, and tossed it aside with an ironic gesture. His little belligerent eyes were screwed up, hiding themselves. He nodded to Gale.

"Well, we have held the fort for him, señor," he said. "He is satisfied. But you and I must begin to build again."

XII

1

Claire sat before her fire in the dusk. It was only a few minutes ago that she had been picturing the future to herself, quietly and steadily, facing it out to the very end so that she should never be overwhelmed again or feel that anyone had wronged her. She had known so little, had been so blind. But she was glad that now, at any rate, she could be decent and see that what had happened was her own shadow thrown on life.

Peterkins would grow up. But she mustn't try to take it out of Peterkins because she was lonely and had let her chance of happiness slip through her fingers. She must let him go his way —which would never be her way. Because Peterkins didn't make mistakes. He knew what he wanted and wasn't frightened of himself.

So it would go on. And she would do pleasant, passionless things: travel a little, have friends, try to be kind. And one day she would die and carry with her this deep love.

That was how she had talked to herself about it all. And now Jane stood there in the firelight, gaunt and young and tragic, but quiet and quite certain. She was going away.

"I know," Claire had said eagerly and very tenderly. Because above all else now she wanted to keep her sister—this Baby Jane whom she had nursed, who had been like her own baby at a time when such things as babies had filled her with a sense of awe and beatitude. (Because they came as a gift from God to people who loved each other. Afterward they frightened her: they were almost sinister, like little omens of a dark, threatening evil.)

But Jane had shaken her head.

"No, it's not what you think, Claire. I'm going to India with an old school pal who wants to do good works." She smiled crookedly, "I'm going to do good works, too."

The maid came in bringing tea, and amid the delicate murmur of silver and fine china the two sisters looked at each other and waited.

"No, we won't have the lights, Mary. The fire's so bright."

The soft closing of the door.

"India—I don't understand——"

"Yes, you do—you do really. You know it's all wrong—what's happening—you and Baise and I——"

"You and Baise," Claire whispered.

"No, I'm out of it. Don't—don't let's talk too much, darling; please, do you mind? You must try to believe that I know. It's all wrong. It's all foolishness. I've been—just a love-sick kid, wanting love, as I suppose kids do—and Baise—wanted it too long."

"I know. I wasn't angry—not—not even hurt. I'd lost something through my own fault. I was glad that it was you who had found it."

"It was yours all the same. It was you he really fell in love with—the you before the War when everybody was happy—and I loved him as much as he had wanted you to love him. I didn't understand, either—I thought I had the right—because you didn't care and couldn't give him what he wanted. I was all wrong, too. I was as blind as he was."

"But it's done now. It's you——"

"No, it's not me. If it was I'd go ahead, I'd hold on to what was mine. I'm hard in my way—at least, I'm not sentimental. I couldn't do grand, self-sacrificing things with no sense to them, making everybody miserable. If Baise and I belonged to each other and could be happy, I'd think, 'It's two against one.' I did think that for a time. But now I know—and Baise knows."

"Baise loves you."

"Yes, he does. Perhaps he always will—as one loves something one dreamed about when one was very young. But he can't have me, Claire. He can't afford to be unfaithful. Some people can, perhaps; it's their nature to go on from one thing to another—they're not better or worse than anyone else. But Baise isn't like that. It's killing him. I've watched him. Even while we've been planning what we shall do, I've seen it in his face. His being blind makes him so defenceless. He can't hide things the way we can. Perhaps he doesn't even know them as we do."

"I haven't known them, either," Claire murmured, "until it was too late."

"This isn't too late. He knows now. He's missed something—but we can't have everything, it seems. You're not his youth, Claire; you never were. You're his quiet, middle years. You've had to wait till he caught up with you. But now you're together——" Her wisdom seemed to fail her. She was playing with a little silver ornament on the mantelshelf, hiding her face for the first time. "You do love him, don't you—awfully?"

The elder woman lifted her eyes from the fire. She was on the verge of a denial, but there was a stark veracity in the upright young body that demanded no less from her.

"Yes," she said.

"And he loves you. So—so that's settled."

"It can't be," Claire said, "even if it were true—it isn't—but even if it were——"

"You're worrying about me. I'll be all right. I *am* all right now; I've got myself back and that's what really matters. It's been ghastly—this going to pieces inside. I'll go and find a little war of my own and forget all about it. No—not forget, but get things straight."

"You're breaking your heart, Jane. Do you think I could be happy—or Baise?"

The fine dark head lifted with an effort.

"I won't break my heart. I don't pretend it isn't—isn't hurt-

ing damnably. But it won't hurt always; I'll get better. Even though it doesn't seem possible now, I know in my mind that it will. I mean it to. After a bit I'll—I'll get interested in things—some day I'll fall violently in love. And then I'll come home and we'll all be happy—we'll have each other again—you and Baise and I—and—and whoever it is——" She tried to laugh.

"Oh, my dear—I can't bear you to talk like that—you're too young to know so much"

"Not too young." She spoke with a sudden vehement bitterness. "We can't be too young to know things, Claire. It's all wrong to shelter us—to put off reality until a third of our life is lost to us. People ought to be hard up against it from the moment they can stand, so that when they come to be as old as I am they'll have a decent chance—they'll know what life is and what they are—so that they shan't make such illusions for themselves—these frightful mistakes——"

She stopped, and a brief, tremulous silence fell between them; then she went on quietly:

"I've told Elizabeth. She seemed so outside everything and so puzzled—with Justine gone no one knows where or why, and we two all in pieces. I thought I'd help her to understand. Of course she can't, old darling—she's far too beautifully made—but I think she was pleased at my trying, and glad that I was doing the honourable thing. She thinks I'm doing it because it's honourable—not because it's just common sense."

A blazing log fell from the fire into the grate, and Claire bent and lifted it back into its place. Jane saw that the fine white hands were trembling. "I'm not trembling at all," she thought, "and I feel as though I were dying—or going to be sick." Aloud she went on:

"And I've told Baise. We talked and talked and last night I wrote to him. He won't fight any more, he's too honest. But at first he'll be terribly unhappy, I know—you'll make it easy, won't you? It isn't a case of forgiving anyone, is it?—but of loving—a great deal——"

Suddenly Claire straightened. She held out her hand.

"Baby Jane, come here."

For a moment the young figure held back, desperate in defence of its last physical reserve. Then it broke. They were together again, crying in each other's arms, Jane's head against the thin and gentle breast.

"Oh, Claire, Claire, my darling, I'm so happy—I can bear it now. I've got you back too, my darling, my darling—you're more to me than all the Baises in the world—deep down you are—and I've got you back——"

And Claire held her close—closer than she ever did Peterkins, who didn't want to be held.

"My baby—my Baby Jane——"

It was dark when Baise Lindesfarne came to Claire's gate, but the blinds of her window had not been drawn and there was light on the path. Now even if she had wanted to escape him, Jane would have had no chance. For he was aware of her with every aching nerve of his body. So they stood opposite each other in the warm, steady beam of Claire's lamplight.

He spoke her name. It was weighted with all his despair and confusion—the utter inadequacy of words. Everything that they could say they had said so many times. And it had brought them inevitably to this.

She made a gesture that mercifully he could not see.

"No, we mustn't talk. Just go—quickly." She went up to him and took him by the lapels of his rough coat as she had done in the wild, unregenerate days of her first love, and kissed him on either cheek. "Now be happy. Don't wait any more. You don't need to, you are so loved, Unky Baise—so much loved."

She twisted herself free and ran out into the dark.

For a long time he stood where she had left him. He was crying but he did not know it. He felt as though the life were ebbing out of him. Then almost imperceptibly the tide within him turned. He did not want to believe that it was turning, but

in spite of him it flowed back, lifting him from the rocks where he lay bruised and battered, carrying him home.

Claire's door stood open to him. The smell of burning wood, the faint, sweet smell of flowers that breathed out of everything that was hers, greeted him, more poignant than sound or vision. He groped his way to the warmth where she sat and stood beside her, blind with weariness.

"Claire, what use can you have for me?"

She took his hand and laid it against her cheek.

"Wait—wait just a little——"

But it was as Jane said. He had waited too long. He was tired out. He knelt beside her as Jane had done, and she laid her gentle hands on his shoulders, on his head, on his closed eyes—trembling, diffident—then with a sudden strength that was almost stern, held him against her heart.

2

About this time the family would be at Tilbury saying good-bye to Jane. They would be sitting in her cabin, and Baby Jane would be laughing and making jokes about herself. Clive would be there, rather silent, thinking that he was in an awful fog about it all.

Justine walked on and on—down Regent Street and then into Piccadilly and along the fringe of the Green Park. She would have liked to hug Baby Jane, just once. She knew all about it now, and it was as though the bond between the three sisters had been reforged in their maturity so that it would never break again. Baby Jane had written—care of a London post office, which was the only address they had—a very gallant letter, not trying to be gallant at all, but only matter-of-fact and sensible.

Justine didn't know where she was going; there was no place on earth that mattered to her. She waited for the traffic out of pure habit. If a bus had run over her and made a clean job of it,

she would have been grateful. She wanted to die—or rather there was nothing else to do. It seemed odd that anyone as strong and healthy as she was, not driven by hunger or any outward pressure, should yet reach a point from whence there was no way. She supposed that most people who killed themselves were forced to it by this inner necessity—this need to cut free at one stroke from an impossible spiritual tangle. For with her it was that, and that only. She was not afraid and not ashamed. But unendurable things had happened which could never be put right. She had lost something without which she could not live.

Past the little house. Occupied now. Strange curtains in the windows. She looked at it dully, not able to feel any more, her mind a kind of blank sheet on which a crazy cinematograph operator was reeling off a series of disconnected pictures, sometimes repeating them till she was sick with disgust—till she wanted to beat her head against a wall to put an end to them. Particularly there was that quaint, old-fashioned bedroom, the fire long since burned out, leaving it dull and hideous, the dawn breaking over the gray moorland, and Nat asleep. She saw herself sitting by the window watching him. His composed and dreamless face had nothing to fear from her. It concealed nothing—had nothing to conceal. She could not hurt; he was unhurtable. But for the first time she saw that he was tragic in that invulnerability. It put him outside the vast, disorganized brotherhood of men. He knew nothing of his own loneliness. He hadn't known—hadn't even felt that in that night her body had remained contemptuously unaware of him, and that her deepest self had denied him wholly. He had been satisfied. And that satisfaction made him seem almost physically deformed. She shrank from him even while she was stirred by a genuine compassion.

She had wanted to go before he woke, to walk out on to the bleak, clean moor, into the mist, and never come back. It was of no use her staying. He would never understand what she had

to say. But perhaps that would be cowardly. At least by going she would make him ridiculous, and that was one vital unkindness that she could spare him.

So she had sat there by the window, waiting patiently for him to wake.

Absurd scenes, their first and last breakfast together—to satisfy the innkeeper and his servants. No need to add one sort of scandal to another. She could see his dark, contemptuous face across the table, his eyes searching hers still with an incredulous anger. Hadn't she sent for him? Hadn't he been prepared to sacrifice his whole career to her? No—he hadn't burned his boats, thank God. But hers was another case altogether. She had given herself to him. And a woman who gave herself to a man had done something irrevocable—irrevocable for the time being, at any rate, he added sullenly.

She had begun to laugh—had had hard work to stop herself. She must have seemed utterly indecent to him. In fact, she was half crazed with weariness and impatience.

"When I shake hands with you, it will mean more to me," she had said.

After that he had been silent. It was the gross, incredible insult of a madwoman.

And then a blur. Nothing clear. Wandering about from one place to another—not knowing why exactly, not caring. Doing everything mechanically, but aware somewhere at the back of her mind that she must move on—keep ahead of an invisible pursuit. She felt it behind her, close on her heels, and her own growing weariness. Sooner or later she would be overtaken. And she was afraid, cringingly, meanly afraid. It wasn't like the fear of death—a thing of the body that one's spirit could take by the collar and shake and bully into decency. It was the fear of life, of one's self—a self that had gone to pieces.

She remembered where it had happened. For days the thing's

hot breath had been on her neck. Now it pounced—took hold—and it was all over. She remembered the little Gloucestershire village, falling into its winter sleep, the narrow lanes, half choked with beech leaves where she had walked for hours, saying aloud over and over again, "No, it isn't possible—it isn't just." As though life had any concern with the human conception of justice or with the strange spiritual demands man had begun to make upon himself. It was concerned with its own laws, with plain common facts. It made no difference at all that those plain facts must bludgeon Justine Braddyl out of existence.

It was the least she could do. She would try to make it seem like an accident—write gay, amusing letters from some seaside place where she had gone on a holiday. She might even deceive the family, though that she doubted, for there was some secret nerve binding them to one another that would make them aware of her invisible disaster. But at any rate she would spare them the whisperings, the sly glances, the headlines in the papers—the nastiness of it all.

There was no one who would really understand.

She wanted to be dead. She felt half dead already—tottering like an old woman. It amazed her to see herself in the glass of a shop window—so well dressed and composed looking, a little wan, perhaps, like someone who hadn't slept.

Birdcage Walk, the Park, through the Admiralty Arch. She was driven by some instinct. Surely if she went on long enough she would find some place that had significance—that would bring her some sort of illumination. For again it wasn't death that horrified her, but this dying in ugliness, this confusion and rot within herself. Now she stopped short, aware that she had touched the fringe of a new influence. Something was happening. It seemed at first that the change was physical—that this apparent slowing of the whole pulse of life was no more than the shadow of her own death. Then an incident that

[redacted] so strange it was almost laughable shook her into full awareness.

A big, red-faced bus that had come rollicking down from Piccadilly suddenly stood still. Its engine died and the driver sat at his wheel staring in front of him. It was as though a Gargantuan monster had run straight into a web of enchantment. And around it the squat, bustling taxis and long lean cars fell asleep where the spell had overtaken them. And the people—Trafalgar Square was black with them. Their sombre tide flowed down to Westminster and along the Strand, as far as the eye could reach. They stood so close to one another that they made one body, composing itself into a common state of being. They waited. They did not move or speak. Amazingly Justine heard Big Ben striking the hour—the whirr of pigeons' wings overhead. Then that for which the people waited descended upon them. The one thing that they had attained and which had not been promised them for the slaughter of years—the new Pentecost—a communion of saints——

Justine knew that she had been crying for a long time without knowing it. She was shaken and weak with crying, and yet no tears would come. The two minutes spread backward and forward into eternity. The heart must break under them.

"Oh, Gale, my darling, well done, well done——"

She wondered if she had spoken aloud or whether her voice was only a note in that tremendous chorus of recollection. She looked up. The man next her met her eyes. It was evident that he had been waiting for her. In Elliot's face was the remembrance of so many dead. They made no gesture of recognition, but in their steady regard of each other something passed between them that could never be spoken. Words must infallibly shatter the significance of their silence. He turned quickly and was gone.

But Justine stood where she was until, like a river, the crowd carried her on with it in a great resurgence of life and purpose.

3

They had made a rough, temporary roof over the great cavity where the tower had been, for it was winter and not fitting that the Virgin and her Child should endure the bitterness of the open skies. Tall candles had come from Tuella to stand about her, and with them a strange priest. Looking up at his indifferent face, the people remembered Valeza and the white fire of his godless compassion for them. Now he lay there with Don Cristóbal and Chiquita. There was only one pall and one pair of trestles, so that two of the rough coffins rested uncovered on the stones. But Don Cristóbal's stood high up between them with the silver cross shining on the velvet and the rathole tucked carefully out of sight.

Old María knelt alone in his shadow, her hands crossed upon her breast, as motionless and time-worn as the effigy of a tomb.

The three made strange companions for the journey, Gale thought. Yet in himself they seemed to unite in peace, for they had been his friends. Grief he felt, but it had the quality of pity for all men. For the half-crazed upholder of a forgotten greatness, for the blaspheming priest and derelict woman, a brief tale of hunger and desire and wild illusion was finished. Their lives were fruitless. But failure was not the essence of their universal tragedy. Had they died in splendour they must only have seemed the more pitiable. Clearly, if there was any justification for life, it must be elsewhere than in achievement, and to that secret even Chiquita might have penetrated at the last. But it was their loneliness that wrung Gale's heart—a final loneliness that none escaped. "If there was nothing else in life to make us have compassion upon one another, that should be enough," he thought.

The priest pronounced the sacred words. Twelve men stepped out and lifted the three coffins on their shoulders. Gale and Balthazar, who had been Don Cristóbal's right-hand men, walked at his head. It was rightly ordered, yet Gale wished

that he could have carried Chiquita, whom he had failed and who had suffered loneliness more bitterly than any of them.

Old María kept pace with them. It seemed almost that her bent and broken body was upheld by a force outside herself and which, when the time came, would gently let her go.

So they went out into the thin winter sunlight and wound their way up to the cemetery which by great effort had been made decent. A new cross had been put over the gateway to welcome them. The three graves lay side by side, and the priest, his vestments fluttering in the faint wind, stood at their head against a background of white mountains. There was no sound but his arid voice, the shuffling of feet, the hollow murmur of falling dust and stone. Gale took a handful of the red earth and sprinkled it over Chiquita's hidden face. It was the last thing he could do for her—a gesture of farewell before he went back for a little while to his own life.

Pepe stood beside him, and at his heels the unbaptized and shivering Leah.

When it was over the people dispersed silently, the men together and the women together, as was their way in all great events. But old María held her place by the half-filled grave. Gale stood on the other side, and she lifted her black, sunken eyes and looked at him steadily but without a sign. And he knew that there was nothing to be said and that she did not need him or anyone. If he had said, "I thank you, too——" she would not have understood. They were like two soldiers who had fought side by side and who, now the battle was over, must go their ways. He made a gesture that was a salute and a farewell.

Balthazar had waited for him and they went into the deserted *fonda* and drank Balthazar's best wine together while they talked of what was to be done. Many of the houses were in ruins and the people destitute, and with winter upon them they might have to face a second and worse disaster. Gale and Balthazar were the strong men of the village. Don Cristóbal had chosen them, and now that he had handed on the defence it

was for them to take stern, rigorous measures. Gale knew that there could be no resort to money. Almost they had forgotten that he was not poor like themselves, and now least of all must he remind them. He could bring them nothing but his strength.

But he and Balthazar would do the work well this time. The enemy should not break in again. It gave Gale a sense of peace and quiet exaltation to think that something of himself would be built into these sheltering walls and into the high tower that would rise again above the Virgin's throne so that for miles around people should know where she awaited them. The passion to add his fragment to the fabric of life still burned in him, but now he was content that it should be unrecognized. No one would ever know that Gale Braddyl had passed this way. It did not matter. The nameless artist who had wrought the Virgin into the visible expression of his own mystical experience had done his work. That was enough for any man.

"The tower must come first," Balthazar grumbled. "The people won't have it otherwise. They'll say the Virgin has saved them a second time. She must come before all of us."

He looked at Gale with a sardonic grimness, and Gale said gravely:

"They are right. She comes before all of us." And Balthazar laid his big hand in brotherly fashion on Gale's shoulder.

"*Eso es, señor.* To-morrow we will begin."

The winter's dusk was settling fast over the plains as Gale and Pepe and Leah went down the hill together. A long night lay before them, and Gale prayed that he might sleep. He had an almost childish dread of the empty, silent house. And yet he was not unhappy, but curiously, deeply at peace.

"There is a cart coming up the road, señor," Pepe said, pointing.

Gale nodded. "It's a long way off. Whoever it is, it will be dark before they reach us."

They built up the fire and made supper, which they ate

almost in silence. Pepe was tired. Having to keep quiet so long made religious ceremonies very trying. He nodded over his bowl of soup, and presently Gale rolled him up in blankets in his corner away from the firelight. For a while he sat beside him, the small brown hand in his, and they looked at each other intently as though they were on the verge of saying something very important. But before he knew what it was Pepe had fallen asleep.

The door of Chiquita's room was closed. Gale opened it. He had the poignant conviction that she was still there and would be feeling shut out from their companionship. He went in as though to say good-night to her. On the white wall beside her bed was a crude drawing of her heart. After Gale had left her, it seemed, with the agony of death upon her, she had found a pencil and, having no other language, had drawn this universal symbol. Perhaps she had felt that she had been churlish. He had said that he loved her and she had made no answer—until now.

Gale went back to the fire. It was of no use going to bed. He sat there with his face between his hands, given over to a strange sense of emptiness. He was like a house that had been swept clean for its new owner, and that waited. Once he drowsed a little, and then he imagined that the silver Virgin and her Child had come down from their high place to sit with her.

"Do you know my truth now?"

And he answered confusedly: "Yes, I believe in the Virgin Birth and in the Immaculate Conception of life. But of what use is that to me?" And then suddenly he heard himself say, "Justine——!" loudly as though he were calling for her.

He started wide awake. His own voice had been part of the dream. But there was someone knocking at the door and, stumbling and heavy-eyed, he went and opened it.

He fell back before her, saying nothing, and she came in—just across the threshold. For an eternity it seemed they stood

there in the firelight looking at each other. Then her eyes, shadowed with weariness, went past him as though seeking someone. But he shook his head.

"She has gone. She died three days ago—I am alone." He added, "Except for Pepe and Leah. I thought, you knew, at one time that Pepe was my son. But he is only a little boy whom I am very fond of——"

He smiled awkwardly. He supposed that it was rather funny—his telling her all that before she had even spoken. He ought to have exclaimed—questioned her. But in some strange way he had passed beyond the convention even of astonishment. This was a place of miracles.

"Are you angry with me for coming?"

"No, I think I've been praying for you."

"Perhaps that's what hurried me so," she said in the same tone of simplicity. "I knew that I ought to wait until to-morrow, but I couldn't. I heard of all that had happened up here. There were things I had to tell you——"

"Yes—I know——"

"There is nothing I have come to ask," she went on. "But there are things you, at any rate, have to understand."

"Justine—I suppose I've been waiting for you—even though I didn't know it. Won't you sit here with me again by the fire? This is your old chair, you know; I kept it."

She shook her head.

"No, that can't be any more. You must try to think of all that as—as apart from what we have become."

"No," he said stubbornly.

"But you must—I shall make you see that you must."

"Perhaps I have things to tell you, too," he murmured.

"I have lived with Nat—I have been his mistress——"

"I knew, of course—long ago——" he regarded her steadily. "You didn't belong to him—it doesn't matter."

"Gale, can you believe that?"

He went out and she heard him talking and a man's gruff

answer. The sound of wheels faded into the distance. He came back, closing the door quietly. "I told your driver you wouldn't need him—that you are staying with me——"

"Oh, Gale, my dear, you don't understand——"

"There is such a lot we have to say to each other. One night won't be long enough. Do you remember that other night? This is another sort of talk—it's a continuation all the same."

"Gale, I am going to have his child."

He had been bending down, remaking the fire. Now he stood up straight. The glow was on his face and she asked quickly:

"What is it? What are you thinking?"

"Something so silly, so inadequate. I was thinking, 'She is the light of my eyes.'"

She made a gesture that was like a break in the surface of her stern quiet.

"Please—you mustn't say things like that."

"Mustn't I? It just jumped into my head."

"Gale, what I have to tell you is quite simple. Then I'll go away again. I thought you ought to know, that it might help you to live—as it helps me. There never was anyone but you—there never can be——"

"I knew that, too," he said almost to himself.

"At first I thought I couldn't live, I wanted to kill myself. There didn't seem anything else I could do. It was so intolerable—that just out of *that*—like a sort of insult——"

"But that was all wrong of you. It just isn't important."

"What is important, Gale?"

"I don't know. At least, I do know, but I can't put it into words—not well. But it's whatever there is between you and me. You know it too, that's why you've come, isn't it?" He smiled slyly. "You might have written, you know."

"It's true—I had to see you—I felt I couldn't make you believe otherwise. Gale, I tried to go through with it—out of a perverted sense of fair play. But I couldn't. There are things

one can't do. I bore it less than twenty-four hours. If I hadn't tried I suppose I would never have known once and for all that whatever else I have to endure that couldn't be endured." She paused, and then went on grimly, "I don't want to pretend anything. It wasn't even shame or disgust, Gale—as you say, it didn't matter enough. It wasn't real—it was like a trivial sort of nightmare that I could have shaken off—almost forgotten. But when I knew that it was to mean more than that——"

"It's only another life," he interrupted, "not yours or mine or his—something that we must set on its way as best we can."

"Gale—what has happened to us?"

"A great deal—or perhaps not much after all—just a clearing away of things that don't matter—not really. They made a lot of trouble once—now it seems difficult even to remember them. Do you know what I am trying to get up courage to ask? I am trying to ask if you will please never to go away again?" He laughed to himself. "But that's just stupid. Because I won't let you—this time I'm clear about it all. This time I'll kill you first."

She flushed, her eyes suddenly bright with challenge.

"It would be kinder—more decent."

"Even if you do suffer," he went on vigorously, "even if we both have to go through hell sometimes—we know now where we both belong. We know we've got to go together. This thing has happened to us and it's final. We've got to deal with the rest as best we can—with all our love——"

He took a step toward her. She was in his arms. And in that embrace were merged tears and laughter, and tenderness and an enduring compassion. But what was uppermost in both of them was laughter—the laughter of release, an immeasurable gaiety of heart.

"Gale, I wasn't honest—I had to see you—to touch you."

"Now will you sit with me by the fire and talk a little while before we go to sleep together?"

"So many things—I want to tell you about Armistice Day —it was then I knew I'd have to come——"

"I was thinking about you. I thought, 'Now we are thinking of each other.'"

Pepe raised himself. But he was bewildered with sleepiness. He sat there and rubbed his eyes and yawned and stared at the strange woman sitting by the fire and stroking Leah.

"This is my wife, Pepe," Gale said.

Pepe woke up.

"I thought it was the Virgin," he said thankfully. He added with a grave politeness, "But the Señora is so much more beautiful."

THE END

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